

IN PLANE SIGHT:  
THEORIES OF FILM SPECTATORSHIP AND ANIMATION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

This dissertation undertakes to assess the pertinence of established theories of cinematic spectatorship to understanding viewers' perception of animation, particularly cel and other animating cinematic practices (like claymation) that do not attempt to approximate the look of live action filming. The study considers the usefulness of psychoanalytic theories, cognitive studies, and cultural studies approaches to film spectatorship, in particular, to grasping animation's impact on audiences. I argue that aspects of those film theories, although developed largely in relation to live action film, not only elucidate many facets of viewer responses to animated films, but also together yield a usefully comprehensive approach to cinema spectatorship more generally. The dissertation argues that theories of film spectatorship relating to four issues—questions of realism, character engagement, and the impact of sound effects and music—generally work to analyze audiences' experience of animation. However, those overarching theories do require revision to account for two further issues that arise due to particularities in animation's construction and reception: spectators' readings of animated characters' gendered and raced bodies and the accompanying disembodied voice performances.

The dissertation's first of four chapters offers a metacritical overview that traces historical and subsequent developments in theories of film spectatorship grounded in psychoanalytic and cultural studies and more recently cognitive psychological approaches. I argue thereby that aspects of these now well-established theories can, despite some limitations of each and inconsistencies among them, complement each other in analyzing cinema spectatorship, better than can any single grand theory of film spectatorship. Chapter One thus introduces the

dissertation's thesis: meaningfully conjoining theories of film spectatorship can generate a productive, thorough-going approach to analyzing how we understand animation.

Chapter Two discusses how particularly cognitive theories of film viewing can account for animation's perhaps unexpected capacity to evoke realism and the style's attendant ontological claims. I take up the issue of realism and animation by analyzing, with attention to contrasts between realist style and evocations of "realism" for the viewer, three variously animated versions of the classic children's tale *The Velveteen Rabbit*, which itself thematizes what it means to be, seem, or even *become* (perceptually, as well as emotionally) real. I devote the second half of Chapter Two to a comparison of animated and live action versions of *The Secret Garden*. Those analyses demonstrate how established theories of film spectatorship, singly or in combination, can help us account for viewers' responses particularly to animated characters. I demonstrate that both texts evoke and engage in the same effective invitation to experience enacted (live action or animated) interpersonal engagement and sympathy.

Chapter Three considers the structuring of spectator response to bodies of animated characters which in pronounced ways engage American cultural issues of gender and racial difference. The chapter analyzes films that mix live action and animation as a locus for testing how psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches might explain varied responses to animation film. I argue that both established approaches to spectatorship need elaboration to account for animation's capacity to make or highlight racial and gender representation as factors of character "performance" in the animated film. The difference in filmic modes necessitating this elaboration occurs beyond shared issues of narrative and cinematographic point of view and semiotic systems operating in animation as well as live action films. I argue specifically that spectators' comprehension of animated screen bodies requires elaboration of theories of viewing, for American animation's

conventions of representing gender and race often exaggerate social markers in ways that may caricature gender and simultaneously encode and camouflage racialized performance.

In the final chapter I argue that established psychoanalytic and cognitive theories of the workings of film music and sound effects generally pertain also to animation. However, some psychoanalytic theories about cinema voices cannot without revision explicate the impact of voice in animated films because, in contrast to their impact in most live action film, voices in animation are not anchored in a body that viewers assume to have the capacity of speech. More productive analyses of voice's workings in animated features derive, I argue, from cultural studies approaches to star images of known voice actors. I also argue that dubbing films into different languages works distinctively in the reception of animated film, due to general audience acceptance of disjunction between images and sound track as a practice in all animation, in contrast to expectations of congruence in live action.

The dissertation in sum demonstrates that some established theories of spectatorship apply to animated film, while other theories require modification to productively explain animation's workings. Cognitive theories of cinema help us grasp how animated styles can create a sense of realism and structure spectators' character engagement. Yet animation spectatorship may diverge from the account that psychoanalytic and cultural theories give of the impact of embodied figures on screen, to the extent that animation both depicts and conceals race and gender differently than do live action films. Sound effects and music do, I argue, seem to function the same way in both live action and animation; yet, again, psychoanalytic theories of voice require elaboration to account adequately for animation's capacity to connect the voice of a performer with a body that has no indexical relation to the screen image. Finally, cultural (star) studies approaches to cinema reception can, I argue, help account for the divergent impact of

voice tracks between live action and animated films, also the distinctive experience of watching an animated feature with differing star performances in varied language versions.

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## Introduction

Animation plays a significant role in the American film industry. In 2012, five of the fifteen “top-grossing” films were entirely animated, while all of them included computer generated effects.<sup>1</sup> These movies matter to the industry because they earn millions of dollars and to scholars of film theory because animated works have become inexorably integrated into the mainstream film experience. Even before the recent expansion of animation’s uses across a range of feature films, animation has long been a key aspect of American feature cinema, beginning in short films and then in features, following the commercial and critical success of Disney’s *Snow White* in 1937.

Despite the long-standing significance of the mode, animation has never received anything approaching the academic attention—especially among film theorists—as live action film. The first arguably scholarly book dedicated to animation dates only to 1982.<sup>2</sup> Film scholar Kristen Thompson has argued that “The ultimate ideological result of the assumption that cartoons are for children was a trivialization of the medium.”<sup>3</sup> The marginalization of animation has led to theorists providing less scholarly address than live action film has received. However,

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<sup>1</sup> “2012 Domestic Gross” *Box Office Media*, accessed February 18, 2013.

[http://www.boxoffice.com/statistics/alltime\\_numbers/domestic/data/2012](http://www.boxoffice.com/statistics/alltime_numbers/domestic/data/2012).

<sup>2</sup> I refer here to Crafton’s historical work on early animation. Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Kristin Thompson, “Implications of the Cel Animation Technique,” in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), 111.

my interest in animation initially arose in part from a desire to understand children as spectators. The theories of spectatorship that I engage with in this dissertation, including psychoanalytic theories, cultural studies approaches, and cognitive theories, focus either implicitly or explicitly on adult audiences. The comparatively few media scholars who do examine children as viewers do so often from sociological approaches focused on the impact of media on young consumers. These analyses of children's viewership, however, do not examine children spectators in the same ways that, for example, psychoanalytic theories have analyzed female spectatorship or queer theories have analyzed queer spectatorship. By and large, film theorists have not examined how children's experience of spectatorship may differ from that of adults. However, understanding children as spectators could teach us more about film's workings in general. While I continue to find this gap in film's theorization fascinating, my initial undertaking to approach children spectators revealed the challenges in examining the spectatorship of a virtually untheorized group that includes viewers with different levels of understanding and abilities to communicate. Thus I concluded that, while I may approach aspects of children's spectatorship in later scholarship, my dissertation needed to focus on the more immediately practicable project of addressing the gap in theorizing spectatorship of animation by adults. I thus established as a departure the well-developed theories of spectatorship of live action film, which have implicitly or explicitly addressed adult spectators.

Happily, attention to animation's workings from film theoretical perspectives has increased in recent years. My dissertation aims to contribute to that broadening discourse by sorting through well-established approaches to film spectatorship to examine which of those theories, as elaborated in relation to live action film, can effectively account for viewers' responses to animation and, by contrast, which require modification to pertain to spectatorship of

animation. My analysis of the theories does reveal some important distinctions between live action and animation spectatorship, leading me to call for better integration of disparate theories of film spectatorship as well as incorporation into all such theories of an awareness of the modal differences between live action and animation.

Two decades ago, Judith Mayne's metatheoretical book *Cinema and Spectatorship* made an important scholarly intervention at a critical juncture of film studies.<sup>4</sup> Mayne's 1993 work undertook to generate a productive dialogue among psychoanalytic, cultural studies approaches, and cognitivist theorists of film spectatorship by constructing an assemblage of theories that were then undergoing engaged contestation. The first half of the book sequentially summarizes paradigms of cinema spectatorship, with emphasis on the psychoanalytic and culture studies models which emerge as Mayne's preferred approaches, in contrast to the still-emergent cognitivist models. Mayne addresses psychoanalytic approaches and cultural studies as part of a larger subset of theoretical approaches including ethnographic studies and feminist work. The second half of the book demonstrates how theoretical approaches to spectatorship pertain to particular film case studies. Mayne's analysis focuses on live action melodramas and other films that fit standards of classic live action Hollywood texts, including, for example, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945) and *Field of Dreams* (1989).

Modeling my work after Mayne's, I seek in this dissertation to renew Mayne's interrogation of enduring theoretical premises and arguments that surround issues of cinema spectatorship. As Mayne did, I shall focus on assessing particularly cognitive, psychoanalytic, and cultural studies approaches. Maintaining a focus on the same areas as Mayne enables me to effectively define the parameters of study, for these three approaches stand as prominent theories

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

of spectatorship and together create a broad enough frame to be useful to the field. I propose, however, to test those theoretical approaches with reference to a different object of study than Mayne did, namely animation.

Animation is a filmic mode that Mayne's analysis does not directly exclude but which she also never overtly engages. Still, I find that Mayne's work demonstrates a productive methodology for constructing contexts and frameworks for understanding spectatorship in relation to animation. It is crucial to note clearly that animation is *not* the topic of my study. That is: animation is the object rather than the subject of my dissertation, which focuses throughout on a metacritical perspective on theories of cinema spectatorship. I aim to discover which, if any, such theories may prove productive to our understanding how animated films may engage and create meanings for viewers. Thereby I take animated films (in a variety of lengths, genres, and styles, and ranging across almost seven decades of production) as case studies that allow me to test established theories of film spectatorship. I venture to extend Mayne's metacritical analysis explicitly to animated films and at the same time to update the overview of some theoretical approaches.

Mayne's approach argues that the different theoretical approaches do not necessarily conflict, despite the historical discord between varied theorists. I would further argue that these theories can actually serve together to meaningfully inform a single analysis. Psychoanalytic theories, cultural studies approaches, and cognitive theories all concentrate on different facets of spectatorship, allowing for each approach to engage questions that may be less thoroughly addressed by the others. Combining theories meaningfully allows for a complex approach to spectatorship that does not affirm a single overarching theory or unifying approach. Even as I find of particular interest cognitive theories of film spectatorship, especially as explicated by

Stephen Prince, cognitive theories leave other noteworthy issues such as race and gender unexamined. By contrast, scholars taking cultural studies approaches such as Richard Dyer, Alexander Doty, and bell hooks do analyze issues of race and gender for cinema spectatorship. In this dissertation, I seek to demonstrate that combining theoretical approaches can work effectively and ultimately enriches our understanding of spectatorship.

### Animation Defined as Mode of Cinema Spectatorship

A close consideration of spectatorship of animation presumes a clear understanding of what both terms mean. In the Introduction, I focus on the object of study, animation, in order to frame my theoretical discussion, but I will reserve more detailed discussion of my core subject, cinema spectatorship, for Chapter One, where I introduce the range of theories I find useful to address the phenomenon. To more closely delineate my interest in animation, I would foreground the extent to which disparate definitions of animation have in common an emphasis on the distinctions between animation and live action; many film theorists have not clearly accounted for this difference. I would thus posit here, as I shall demonstrate throughout the dissertation, that the common definition of animation sets it precisely in contrast to live action. In effect, such a persistent definition through difference requires us to consider such a contrast in theorizing animation spectatorship, rather than presuming the unproblematic extension of cogent theories developed with reference to live action cinema. In my discussion from the outset, I approach presumed differences between live action and animated film as points of divergence that could (but need not necessarily) lead to differences in spectatorship. In part for that reason, my case studies in the chapters that follow include several pairings of common narratives as

realized in contrasting animated and live action modes, as well as several films that mix modes of production (and thereby possibly also those of the spectatorial processes.)

To date only a few scholars of animation have defined the mode in relation to its possible impact on viewers, instead usually defining animation as diverging from live action cinema's construction. That is, theorists of animation and/or film more generally have defined animation as a distinctive creative process of production and representation. (Here I would interject that issues of representation—whether in animation or live action—exceed my subject, and that questions of representation will receive attention only in close relation to theories of cinema spectatorship that incorporate facets of representation.) In an innovative work on theories of animation published in 1998, Maureen Furniss points to the prevalent definition of animation historically in terms of the material's construction, rather than its reception or, more precisely for the current context, its spectatorship.<sup>5</sup>

Furniss for example cites Edward Small and Eugene Levinson, who in 1989 jointly, if simply, defined animation as “the technique of single-frame cinematography.”<sup>6</sup> This basic and wide spread definition emphasizes animation's construction and its relation to its creators as definitive. It is thus unsurprising that an introductory film textbook also focuses on processes of creation rather than the significance of a spectator's experience with screen images constructed in divergent ways. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in their *Film Art: An Introduction* offer a “construction”-oriented definition: “*Animated* [sic] films are distinguished from live-

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<sup>5</sup> Maureen Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (London: John Libby & Company Limited, 1998), 4-7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 4.; Edward Small and Eugene Levinson, “Toward a Theory of Animation,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 24, (Fall 1989): 68.

action ones by the unusual kinds of work done at the production stage.... Animators create a series of images by shooting one frame at a time.”<sup>7</sup> Their definition imagines traditional cel or claymation animation more obviously than computer animation, in its focus on frame-by-frame cinematic construction that is not made in “real time.”

On the face of it, such definitions of my object of study may seem clear and unproblematic. I will argue, however, that the popular as well as scholarly assumption of such a definition embeds spectatorial knowledge of presumed authorial mediation in animation. That perspective—that the animator mediates the screen image and its presentation in a way more highly controlled and intimate than presumed possible for live action—is one of six issues relating to theories of animation spectatorship that structure the dissertation.

Definitions emphasizing animated film’s construction make readily evident the direct and even personal influence of the animator on the forms produced, e.g., on characters in a feature animation film. Animators directly “shape” characters’ bodies and thereby also shape spectator experiences, because the animated characters’ bodies bespeak animators’ expectations and biases at the same time they depict recognizable body types. Thus, for example, in drawing or sculpting characters and their movements, animators unavoidably structure the figures’ visual characterizations based not only on aesthetic or historical conventions, but also to some extent on their personal, socially–conditioned perceptions of race and gender. In a new book that begins to address some of these issues, Donald Crafton argues for an understanding of animated character performance as a “composite phenomenon of mind and material that happens in a common space

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<sup>7</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction 9<sup>th</sup> Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 382.

to which animators and audiences have read–write access.”<sup>8</sup> This “Tooniverse,” as he calls it, places both the spectator and the animation in the position of co–animators who create the experience of animation together. Crafton’s analysis thus outlines the influence of the animator while suggesting an understanding of the animated character as a kind of potential star performer. Crafton thus moves toward incorporating perspectives on animation as both a mode of construction and a representational vehicle with impact on the spectator.

A few other books on animation have also begun to explore spectatorial address as an aspect of animation’s technical workings. Thus, for example, while Stephen Prince’s new book *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema* upholds a definition of animation that considers construction more than viewer perception, in analyzing in detail the workings of visual effects he introduces into the discussion a broader range of techniques than do most other definitions. Prince argues, “We cannot understand visual effects unless we overcome the dichotomy in our thinking represented by Méliès and Lumière.”<sup>9</sup> There Prince refers to the divergent types of films made by early filmmakers: Méliès made imaginative short science fiction films that creatively used the cinema to show make-believe worlds, while Lumière filmed commonplace life to generate documentary style films. Prince’s point is we cannot fully understand visual effects, which are created with animation, if we maintain such a dichotomous distinction between fiction and non-fiction in cinema.

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<sup>8</sup>Donald Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2013), 22.

<sup>9</sup>Stephen Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 3.



What distinguishes visual effects from live action still lies, for Prince, in the construction of the images, and those effects include the extensive use of different camera lenses and other production (and post-production) techniques that overlap with practices of live action cinematography. Prince asserts that visual effects are an integral part of most contemporary films, and, further, that spectators often cannot distinguish altered from unaltered live action film images.

Notwithstanding his focus on construction as a means of defining animation, Prince notes that spectators' perception of construction has commonly been tied to the "indexical value" of images for spectators or their belief that an image has "photographic truth."<sup>10</sup> For Prince, then, spectators' inability to distinguish visual effects, as well as those effects' capacity to influence a spectator's sense of realism, has as a consequence a reduction of the viewer's role in recognizing visual effects or ultimately animation. His understanding of visual effects thereby blurs any presumed boundaries between animation and live action, an understanding that might also characterize the experiences of viewers of many contemporary films. However, despite the absence of a clear boundary between animation and live action, there remains a need to examine the very prevalent historical and ongoing production of obviously animated films.

Beyond summarizing established definitions for conventional animation, Maureen Furniss's 1998 work proposes thoroughly reframing animation's definition. Like Prince more recently, she calls for distinguishing between live action and animation not as polar opposites, but rather as phases across a scale acknowledging many gradations and variables.<sup>11</sup> However, unlike Prince's and most other definitions, Furniss's analysis incorporates spectators'

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>11</sup> Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 4-7.

perceptions. Furniss proposes a model to account for such complexity by framing the experience of film modes as a continuum, extending from the perception of images that appear most like a spectator's experience of the world at one extreme, to those that seem especially unrealistic, including specifically abstract animation, at the other.

I do not offer such an overview of definitions with reference to the point of animation's construction in order myself to establish a narrow definition of animation. Rather, as already suggested, I wish to interrogate more closely the general recognition or even, simply, presumption within film studies that animation and live action film are different objects –without such commonplace observation having to date led many theorists to question implicit assumptions that spectatorship of animation and live action film is essentially identical. Especially film theories developed over the past four decades that have sought to account for the impact of spectatorship have implicitly taken live action film as a default. Those theories have received as yet no full systematic assessment of their possible relevance for animation. An overarching question with regard to film spectatorship is whether viewers “read” animated feature films in similar or different ways as they do live action films, as explicated by a number of well-established film theories. Other related, subsidiary questions arise that become a series of issues which organize the chapters that follow.

### Issues in Animation as Mode of Cinema Spectatorship

The first issue I engage in the dissertation is whether the presently best established and well-elaborated theories of film spectatorship, in particular psychoanalytic theories, cognitivist theories, and cultural studies approaches, are necessarily antithetical. That is, might aspects of

those approaches be meaningfully combined or integrated to offer a fuller account of the film viewing experience? Chapter One begins to ask this question and demonstrates its importance through a metacritical overview of the theories of spectatorship in question, but this opening chapter does not itself pursue case study explorations of the question. Chapter One is in fact the only one of the four chapters that offers no case study analysis of specific animated and sometimes also comparable live action films. Rather, Chapter One treats this first question—how psychoanalytic, cognitivist and cultural studies approaches might work in concert – as a basis for my analyzing specific instances of animation in Chapter Two and Three. My preliminary resolution of this issue is, first, to acknowledge some inconsistencies among and limitations to integrating the various theories, but then, second, to realize the bountiful capacity of different approaches to suggest a more thorough-going, effective understanding of spectatorship.

The second issue the dissertation addresses is how theories of film viewing, specifically cognitive theories, account for animation's perceptibly different evocation of realism as a style and also an ontological claim. The issue of differently realized stylistic and conceptualized "realism" across cinematic modes arises especially in relation to cel, claymation, and older forms of animation, as computer generated animation can in some instances appear perceptually similar to live action. I take up the issue of realism and animation in Chapter Two by analyzing, through attention to contrasts between realist style and evocations of "realism" for the viewer, three variously animated versions of the classic children's tale *The Velveteen Rabbit*, which itself thematizes what it means to be, seem, or even *become* (perceptually, as well as emotionally) real. Raymond Williams in *Keywords* describes how forms of art create materials considered "realistic" through their conventions. He argues that "... what is there is what has been made, by the specific practices of writing and painting and film-making. To see it as reality or as the

faithful copying of reality is to exclude this active element and in extreme cases to pass off a FICTION (q.v.) or a CONVENTION (q.v.) as the real world.”<sup>12</sup> The alternative versions of *The Velveteen Rabbit* depict both the setting and the characters in differently “realistic” ways according to the conventions as mentioned by Williams, which do coincide with general spectator expectations. While Williams seems to be warning against seeing images as reality, he does note the impetuosity to think of some kinds of art as more or less realistic.

The third issue queries whether established theories of film spectatorship can, singly or in combination, help us account for viewers’ responses particularly to animated characters. A further related question asks how those responses relate to what theorists have analyzed variously as engagement (the preferred cognitivist term) or identification (that of psychoanalytic film theory) with characters, and also the emotional *affect* of the film. Thus I devote the second half of Chapter Two to a comparison of animated and live action versions of *The Secret Garden*. I demonstrate there that both texts evoke and engage in the same effective invitation to experience enacted (live action or animated) interpersonal engagement and sympathy.

The fourth issue I take up is whether established theories of film spectatorship help us understand the impact on viewers of recognizing an implicit greater visual mediation of the human force behind the drawing, compared to directors sometimes presumed to have an authorial hand over live action films. Thus film viewers may imagine (I posit and explore as a possibility of spectatorship) a more direct connection to the auteur–artists who imagine and create animated bodies particularly in somewhat self–reflexive comedic features, than audiences may do in relation to watching live action films with visually embodied actors. In Chapter Three,

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<sup>12</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Society and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 258.

I undertake to discuss this issue –specifically whether animation’s capacity to heavily caricature character bodies (such as that of Jessica Rabbit in Robert Zemeckis’ 1988 film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*)—requires a different theorization of how animation may evoke social issues like images of race and gender. Chapter Three considers such questions in relation to two Disney-produced films that combine live action and animation.

The dissertation deals with two further issues relevant to my metacritical assessment of film theories, by specifically considering the workings of sound in animated film. Chapter Four examines how established theories of film spectatorship can help us grasp the workings of sound in animation, which cannot carry the same degree of naturalized synchrony with the story, action, and characters on screen as live action. In relation to a 1967 live action film *Playtime*, wherein the French director–actor Jacques Tati essentially performs as a mime, thus emphasizing sound effects and music, I analyze the recent animated film *The Illusionist* (2010). That film, for which Tati wrote the original screenplay, and which is purportedly semiautobiographical, exhibits a similarly mime–like style of performance and use of sound. These two films use sound in interesting ways that illustrate how the relevant theories of sound effects and music (excluding voices) account for how such techniques might function for animation spectators in largely the same way as for live action spectators.

The sixth and final issue, also addressed in Chapter Four, questions how established theories of film reception (a term clarified in Chapter One in relation to theories of film spectatorship) help us understand the impact of recognized voice–over actors as characters in animated narrative film. I explore this issue in relation to two comparatively recent and mostly traditional cel animated films, one from the United States and one from Japan. My analysis of the workings of sound in these two transnationally released films emphasizes how viewers’ capacity

to recognize culturally specific star actors by their voices incorporates –but also challenges—aspects of cultural studies approaches to stars as a facet of theories of cinema spectatorship. I demonstrate that the theoretical approaches to voice and star image, which, as suggested above, animation scholar Donald Crafton has begun to explore, require some modification to account for cultural differences in audiences’ decoding of dialogue sound tracks with respect to the characters’ gender, age, race and other cultural markings.

Those six issues structure the dissertation’s project of theorizing film spectatorship in relation to animation through reconsidering well-established theories in circulation—the metacritical approach which underscores the dissertation— through suggesting further ways of developing those theories. At the outset, and in further explanation for choices I have made concerning theories and films, I would again emphasize the divergence in focus and approaches between theories of cinema spectatorship and theories of representation. In *Cinema and Spectatorship*, Mayne draws such a distinction when she describes the difference in address and reception. She argues that “One of the most significant directions in spectatorship studies has investigated the gap opened up between the ways in which texts construct viewers, and how those texts may be read or used in ways that depart from what the institution valorizes.”<sup>13</sup> While theories addressing reception and spectatorship both serve an important function in understanding film theory, the focus of this dissertation predominantly engages in theories of spectatorship.

I aim in my metacritical overview of theories of film spectatorship in relation to animation to develop meaningful responses to the six key issues that I outline above. For example, I seek to demonstrate that cognitive film theory’s focus on narrative paradigms need

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<sup>13</sup> Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 80.

not necessarily be modified when considering animated visual realizations of narrative. I also argue that the spectatorial impact of most music and sound effects in animation may function similarly in live action and animated film, in part because those elements of spectator address do not turn on animation's distinctive visual construction. I further find that psychoanalytic film theories often pertain comparably for animated as for live action gendered performances, with an exception I discuss in Chapter Three. That is, I find that commonly exaggerated animated performances can generate a hyper real version of the human body and its cultural encoding. However, as Chapter Four in particular will demonstrate, cultural studies approaches that focus on the spectators' cognizance of either characters' racial markers or their awareness of stars in relation to animated performances also require adjustment, particularly when the mode of animation impedes the recognition of familiar voice actors as stars. This dissertation seeks to create an effective discussion of the six issues as delineated to achieve useful understandings of such differences in the spectatorship of animation.

### Overview of Case Studies and Chapter Foci

As noted, I have organized the dissertation in relation to the six issues delineated above, all of which are central facets of investigations from a range of film theoretical approaches. The first chapter establishes an overview of the key theories I consider in the later chapters, attending to how film theorists might best address differences between animation and live action film with regard to perceptions of realism and character, gender and race, and sound and voice (dealt with as successive chapter foci). In deciding how best metacritically to analyze film theories with regard to spectatorship of animation, I chose to take a focused approach to assessing theories in

relation to a few case studies which provide for close textual readings, rather than drawing on numerous examples that might diversely illustrate issues of the larger analysis. The dissertation takes as case studies a small selection of mostly American and generally feature-length animated films to give attention to breath both historically and also stylistically including cel, claymation, and some computer generated animation.

I see the particular films that appear as case studies for each chapter as grounded in both the particular theoretical issues under review and my own interest in examining a broad range and variety of animated narrative films. I pattern the focus on close semiotic studies of a small number of films (rather than discussing a wide sampling of well-known or recent works) on important film theoretical texts such as Bill Nichols' now "classic" work *Ideology and the Image*, which, for example, makes close readings of the American feature Joseph von Sternberg's 1932 *Blonde Venus* and Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film *The Birds* as a means of demonstrating the theories he is developing in a systematic and intensive way.<sup>14</sup> Such rigorous and focused examination of a delimited text enables one then to extrapolate understandings for other works. Similarly, Stephen Prince's recent book *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema* concentrates on close explorations of a few particular texts to establish his arguments in some depth that in turn cogently suggest their broader significance. My decision to focus on case studies aims thus similarly to thoroughly examine how the theories I consider may function in relation to a few particular cinematic images and sounds, which then by extension, I will argue, also pertain to comparable objects in relation to the issues under discussion.

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<sup>14</sup>Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981).



Similarly, I have chosen to focus on the case studies drawn from the most long-standing and until recently widespread practice of animation, cel animation. Notably, however, some of the primarily cel animated films like *Mulan* (Disney, 1998) and *Howls Moving Castle* (Ghibli Studios, 2004) do now incorporate some computer generated effects. Due to my sense that even such a well-established and expansive historical archive of animated works has been underexamined in film theoretical analysis, I privilege cel animation since spectators can generally easily recognize its figures and spaces as animated. Because my subject is how theories that analyze spectators' perceptions may pertain to animated film, I have found it useful to analyze films that are, unambiguously, animated. Thus I have chosen to focus on cel, claymation, and mixed mode films that clearly consist in whole or part of animation. The older films I have chosen are generally instances of films that represent classic Hollywood American animation.

Chapter One begins by discussing recent scholarship that explicitly analyzes theories of film spectatorship with regard to animation, and then considers a much ampler range of theories that have not explicitly addressed animation. Where justified, I have chosen texts that themselves engage thematically in the issues of concern. Thus in Chapter Two, I focus on multiple adaptations of a classic children's narrative that thematizes what is real and how characters emotionally engage with others. Such selection underscores the narrative address of the pertinent themes and helps thereby illustrate the issues in question. I also address several live action films, as well as mixed animation and live action, to facilitate my focus on the spectatorial workings of animation in comparison with live action "controls." The close and systematic comparison of live and animated versions of the same narrative helps demonstrate the crucial issues in relation to animation's differences, with a minimum of complicating factors. The two films considered in Chapter Three thus all offer such a "control" case of live action compared to animation within

the single text itself, allowing for analysis of how the theories function across a single mixed mode film. In sum, the dissertation's primary aim of metacritically assessing cinema theories' relevance to animation led me to choose as case studies films which yielded to clear and efficacious analysis in depth rather than breadth of illustrations or significant slippage into analysis of representational practice seen as separate from spectatorship.

Taking Mayne's structuring of *Cinema and Spectatorship* as a useful template, I begin the dissertation with a kind of "literature review" chapter that considers the historical and subsequent developments in theories of film spectatorship grounded in psychoanalytic and cultural studies and more recently cognitive psychological approaches (which, however I choose to discuss first). I also suggest some connections we can make twenty years after Mayne's intervention among the theories which reference animation. I then begin to examine the relevance of cognitive, psychoanalytic, and cultural studies approaches for animated works and mixed animated and live action films. I also argue for an understanding of animation spectatorship that integrates a range of theoretical approaches, to demonstrate that cognitive theories, psychoanalytic theories, and cultural studies approaches can operate in concert with each other rather than independently, as they have primarily historically appeared.

The range of theories I address can account for patterns of spectatorship simultaneously from different perspectives and have varied strengths and foci which suits them to assessing different parts of a single analysis. For example, cognitive theories build on and demonstrate an abstract concept of engagement with characters, while cultural and psychoanalytic theories assess the implications of that engagement across varied backgrounds and for different spectators. In sum, I tackle in Chapter One what I consider a key point at stake in my project, namely to demonstrate that such theories of spectatorship do not all necessarily conflict, but can

to an extent work as complements in helping us better grasp theoretical concerns particularly in relation to animation.

In Chapter Two, I argue that animated film communicates realism and evokes sympathy in significantly the same ways as live action. My approach in this chapter compares spectator address in a live action control in relation to an animated version of a narrative shared by two or three films. To work through understandings of realism in animation as opposed to or in comparison with live action, I analyze three versions of *The Velveteen Rabbit* that demonstrate a wide scope of representational possibilities within a single narrative. Doing so enables me to determine that a work seeming perceptually like or unlike live action does not necessarily undercut the other varied ways that the text appeals to emotional and narrative realism, as defined in Chapter Two. In the second half of the chapter, I discuss two film versions of *The Secret Garden*, in which I closely compare two representations of the central character, a young orphan named Mary Lennox, through cognitive explanations of character engagement. The cognitive schemas I analyze demonstrate how the animated texts, like live action films, yield the narrative and visual techniques which build such engagement. This chapter establishes viewers' investment in animated characters, which frames perceptions of race, gender, and language.

After considering issues of animation in relation to character creation and impact more broadly, Chapter Three specifically tests theories that consider spectator response to bodies of animated characters evoking American cultural issues of gender and racial difference. The chapter analyzes films that mix live action and animation as a locus at which to compare and understand psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches to film bodies when animated. Scholars have analyzed animated characters as representations of marginalized African Americans and critiqued the hyper-sexualized bodies such as Jessica Rabbit in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. Yet we need to

look more closely at the theoretical workings and implications of these and other characters' artistic construction in and in juxtaposition with realistic-seeming contexts with live actors. I argue that psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches to spectatorship need elaboration to account for the altered social interpretations as factors of character "performance" in the animated film. The difference in modes necessitating this elaboration occurs beyond issues of narrative or cinematographic point of view or semiotic systems operating in the live action scenes.

In the final, fourth chapter, I argue that psychoanalytic and cognitive theories of spectatorship that have developed with reference to live action film's music and sound effects can generally pertain to animation film, in part as most audiences recognize, perhaps more readily than for live action, that the sound track for an animated film has arisen distinctively from the images. Certainly, this separation from the image and the sound often occurs in live action as well, yet the issue I address is spectatorial perception of the disjunction. I argue that some dominant psychoanalytic theories about cinema voices cannot explicate the workings of voice in animated films without revision and adjustment to the circumstance that the voice is not anchored in a body that spectators know to have the capacity of speech. I argue that the most productive theories of voice's workings in animated features are those relating to the star images of known voice actors. I also analyze how dubbing films into different languages may more strongly affect the reception of animated films than live action, as animated films can be more easily dubbed without spectators noticing. This difference has proven especially significant for American and French audiences who typically find dubbing objectionable or distracting.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 130.

Addressing animation systematically from established film theoretical perspectives does yield a complex and sophisticated awareness and analysis of animation spectatorship. As I argue in Chapter Two, the perception of realism would seem to be a large hurdle for filmgoers, but may be less significant than one might anticipate, for in fact spectators rarely expect true-to-life realism in fictional cinema. Similarly, I find that the processes of engagement and sympathy operate in both these live action and animated narratives as spectators look for reasons to readily engage. Yet despite all these similarities across the modes, I argue in Chapter Three that theoretical approaches to the altered and mediated form of animation cannot account for spectator perceptions or access to comprehending raced and gendered depictions in animation. The form of animation necessarily changes spectators' awareness of screen bodies, which can, in effect, readily "warp" the social mirror of gender and race through representation, by exaggerating markers of race while also camouflaging racialized performance. In sum, I argue that film theories developed with reference to live action film, can nonetheless illuminate the workings of animation, even if sometimes by making clear that those theories cannot account for the mode without revision or elaboration.

Chapter One:  
 Animating Theories:  
 How Approaches to Film Spectatorship Relate to Animation

In the opening discussion delineating her subject, Judith Mayne broaches the contentious theoretical meanings of “film spectatorship” by illustrating its varied understandings, rather than narrowly insisting on a singular correct theoretical definition or approach. Her overview from the outset posits broad parameters for the concept: “[S]pectatorship is not just the relationship that occurs between the viewer and the screen, but also and especially how that relationship lives on once the spectator leaves the theater.”<sup>16</sup> Mayne thus establishes an expansive understanding of spectatorship before pointing to the ways that theorists have cast spectatorship more narrowly or sometimes in direct contrast to each other’s tenets.

A focus in Mayne’s discussion is the tension between definitions of the “subject” and the “viewer.” She writes, “I stress throughout this book that the relationship between the ‘subject,’ the position supposedly assigned to the film viewer by the institutions of the cinema, and the ‘viewer,’ the real person who watches the movies, has never been resolved.”<sup>17</sup> Mayne also points to knotty problems occasioned or not resolved by some other approaches, for example, how the concept of the “subject” universalizes the spectator by generally presuming the perspective of an adult white male.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the term “viewer” can nonetheless lead to some problems of relativism. Such friction – or at best ambiguity – in defining the spectator arose especially from

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<sup>16</sup> Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

French scholars in the 1970s like Jean–Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, who focused on the *apparatus*'s effects on a subject. The term *apparatus*, for those theorists, describes the combination of cinema's technological, perceptual, psychological, and institutional structures. In contrast, a cultural studies scholar like bell hooks approaches film spectatorship by discussing particular viewers, especially herself and people she knows as active, conscientious viewers as they differently experience cinema. Integrating such differing conceptual approaches can, I argue, contribute to a more sophisticated conception of animation's spectatorship.

Film theorists have long focused their analyses of spectatorship on live action film, even if only by default through their choice of case studies and examples, through the recurrent, fundamental discussion of connections among the camera, the profilmic event, and the screen representation. Like Mayne, most film theorists have not overtly excluded animation from their analyses, but neither have they included it. The common omission of animated examples in most film theory, compounded with the relatively small field of animation studies, has left the spectatorship of animation and the significance of different modes of representation undertheorized. In examining the relevance of cognitive, psychoanalytic, and cultural studies approaches for animated works and mixed animated and live action films, I analyze their bearing on spectatorship of animation and argue for integrating a range of theoretical approaches. This study aims thereby to help establish a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of film spectatorship.

The distinctive theoretical approaches to film spectatorship that Mayne addresses present, I argue, different implications when directed to analyses of animated film. As I elaborate in the next chapter, my analysis led me to conclude (counter to my initial expectation) that cognitive theoretical approaches do operate consistently across cinematic modes. Cognitive film theory to

date has focused closely on viewers' processes of making sense of narrative and character, which might include engaging or sympathizing with characters as well as perceiving the world on screen as "realistic." My research suggests, that for spectators, live action and animation communicate character and narrative interactions in very similar ways, resulting in comparable theoretical findings.

However, cognitive approaches remain limited in what they can reveal about meaning formation in a cultural context. In contrast, and again counter to my anticipated conclusion, I have observed that psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches do require modification to meaningfully account for the impact of many animated American feature films' gendered and raced representations. I specifically argue that the conventions of animation signify and are read in ways that lead to spectator experience distinctive from that of live action films. My address of animation focuses primarily on conventional hand drawn animation, claymation and computer generated animation that does not seem like live action, but appears visually distinguishable. The often exaggerated but always implicitly socially constructed characterizations do influence spectators' perceptions of films. I will demonstrate how animated features work in ways that live action films do not.

Scholars having generally focused theoretical discussion and examples on live action main stream films has established practices that ignore the complexities of film that includes animation. At the same time this limitation has discounted the ways that alternative modes like animation might expand understandings of perception and realism, engagement and sympathy, the animated body, and sound. However, as noted in the Introduction, a few scholars like Donald Crafton and Eric Smoodin laid the groundwork for such theorization by incorporating some theoretical conceptions of spectatorship of animation focused on the mode's historical and



cultural significance. Subsequently, theorists have begun analyzing animation through theories of representation of race, gender, and star images as well as theories of film spectatorship more explicitly. An example is Richard Neupert's essay "Kirikou and the Animated Figure," published in *Studies in French Cinema*. Neupert demonstrates a pioneering approach to undertaking viewer engagement with animated figures, characters, or bodies, which productively builds on and expands the understanding of "character engagement" usually associated with cognitive film theories. Neupert considers the possible impact of the animated form on spectators' engagement. He points to issues of visual depth and character abstraction in animation with reference to other scholarly analyses of character engagement.

Neupert departs from Edgar Morin's focus on animism and motion as central to spectators' engagement,

The result of such anthropomorphism for Morin is that viewers project their own needs, desires and fear onto the characters brought to life on the screen: "We 'attribute to a person whom we are judging character traits, tendencies that are our own.'"<sup>19</sup>

Neupert then considers the relevance to animation of Jean Mitry's understanding of theories of the cinematic apparatus, which encompasses experiences surrounding but not directly focused on a specific film text. Neupert raises the question of how animation may be significant, but demonstrates that a spectatorial experience of the "strange" does not undermine Mitry's theories and also that the space of the movie theater helps us relate and react. Neupert then argues that the parameters of a character "schema" proposed by Murray Smith, who works largely as a cognitive

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<sup>19</sup> Edgar Morin, quoted in Richard Neupert, "Kirikou and the Animated Figure/Body," *Studies in French Cinema* 8.1 (2008): 9, citing Edgar Morin.

theorist, can extend to describing a discrete, recognizable body, including figures that are abstracted and animated.

Neupert takes the central character from the French animated film *Kirikou and the Sorceress* (1998) as an example of a recognizable discreet body with whom a spectator may develop allegiance. In not taking character engagement in animation as a given, Neupert significantly broadens theoretical discourse on animation. His analysis suggests that animation may function not as a more heavily mediated form of visual representation than live action filming, but rather a mode of film which spectators may perceive and engage with differently. I elaborate this argument in Chapter Two, returning to consider Neupert's rare explicit analysis of spectatorship of animated film as I myself seek to extend the discussion by closely comparing a live action film and an animated version adapting the same narrative. In the balance of this chapter, I turn to other scholars' arguments about film spectatorship more generally, including cognitive theories which have taken live action films as examples, to lay the groundwork for my own explicit analyses of animation forms. I begin with a summary of approaches grounded in psychoanalytic and cultural studies as they represent the most thorough-going and earliest well-developed theories of film spectatorship.

### Psychoanalytic and Cultural Studies Theories of Film Spectatorship

French theorists like Mitry played a significant role in the development of approaches to film spectatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. While they were not the first to attend to the spectator as a locus of film's impact, theorists such as Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Comolli, and Jean Narboni significantly theorized the viewing experience in psychoanalytic and semiotic terms. As

the French contributions began influencing scholars writing in English, in 1973 Laura Mulvey famously posited the significance of the spectator as intrinsically gendered, with 1975 publication in *Screen* of her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”<sup>20</sup> Stuart Hall and Christine Gledhill subsequently theorized spectators’ social inscription in relation to the construction of a film text’s meanings.

Ground-breaking theorists like Richard Dyer and bell hooks have examined both how film has portrayed racial difference, but also how lived racial and gender identity may factor into the creation of meaning for spectators. Dyer as well as Alexander Doty and Judith Mayne have argued, in developing queer approaches to cinema, that experiencing a film from a non-normative sexual perspective can alter spectators’ expectations. These theorists have contributed to building a field of study that seeks to understand film not primarily as textual construction (nor, for that matter, as artistic or economic product), but rather as a cultural phenomenon inviting persistent and engaged spectator involvement. In examining such psychoanalytic and cultural theories in relation to animated features, I seek to demonstrate those theories’ relevance to a broader definition of cinematic experiences which includes animation.

### *Psychoanalytic Theories of Gendered Spectatorship*

Psychoanalytic theories of film’s workings have for almost forty years proven a very important approach to analyzing cinema. Psychoanalytic theories of film, based on Sigmund Freud’s work and that of Neo-Freudian psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, aim in part to analyze the filmic spectator’s processes of identification and object relations with characters on screen.

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<sup>20</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.

Christian Metz, one of the earliest film theorists to work from a psychoanalytic approach, offered a pivotal understanding of film as connected with notions of psychoanalysis and semiotics. He thereby established an understanding of cinema as a part of a linguistic, physical, psychological apparatus that created meaning for spectators. Metz developed an understanding of identification in film viewing not anchored in individual characters, but encompassing the entire experience of the film. This approach lessens the significance of any particular film regardless of its mode, for it coincides with the physical and special influences on viewing a film in a theater. In *The Imaginary Signifier* Metz concludes that "...the spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception."<sup>21</sup> Metz's laid a foundation for much film theory on spectatorship, which subsequent scholars have both built upon and challenged.

In part as a response to Metz's work and his implicit conceptualization of a single universalized spectator, Mulvey tackled the issue of gender identification in film viewing to argue that Hollywood classical cinema addresses only a male-identified (and implicitly heterosexual) spectator.<sup>22</sup> The divergent perspective of Mulvey's female-gendered spectator became widely influential, although she herself did not consider the impact on film viewing of other identity factors like race or sexual orientation. Mulvey's argument focuses on how classic Hollywood film structures male ego identification and thereby works to alleviate the psychic threat of the woman and fear of castration. Her approach can account for male identification with both the dominant male characters and the unfolding of the classical "Oedipal" film narrative,

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<sup>21</sup> Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and the Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975), 49.

<sup>22</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 10.

while demonstrating that female identification is functionally restricted or eliminated by conventional editing and other cinematic practices in dominant filmmaking.

Even while addressing aspects of character identification, Mulvey's analysis focuses on camera perspectives, editing, and narrative emphases. While she does not specifically discuss animated film, I would argue that practices of camera perspective and narrative structure in animation do not deviate to a degree that would invalidate Mulvey's approach for animation. Mulvey also challenges the concept of identification through a specific connection to an on screen character who closely resembles the spectator. She underscores the significance of the narrative cues directing the spectator toward certain perspectives. Such connection between identification, perspective, and structure enables the further possibility that these theories can operate similarly in live action and animation.

In her book *From Reverence to Rape*, Molly Haskell takes a largely sociological approach to the issue of viewer identification, treating film characters as discrete persons as she addresses (live action) film's impact on spectators' relations to gender-biased representations and possible identification with those characters. Explaining the importance of women characters in film to audiences, Haskell argues that,

Far more than men, women were vessels of men's and women's fantasies and the barometers of changing fashion. Like two-way mirrors linking the immediate past with the immediate future, women in the movies reflected, perpetuated, and in some respects offered innovations on the roles of women in society.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 12.

Although Haskell discusses dozens of films and many years of filmic representations of women, she mentions no animated female characters. The emphasis of much of her work does address the significance of stars on spectatorship, as well as the appearance, dialogue, and actions of women in women's films. A number of these issues address concerns present in animation. For example, as I will discuss further in Chapter Four, stars' voices are often recognizable in film, potentially carrying the impact of the star power Haskell outlines. Similarly, characters in both live action and animation may either recite intelligent dialogue and behave in morally upstanding ways or contrastingly behave and speak poorly. While Haskell's arguments make important points about the representations of women in film, considering visually unrealistic works such as animation may be able to enrich her assertions concerning the significance of spectator awareness of a film's construction, or authenticity in live action as well as animation.

E. Ann Kaplan has contributed to an understanding of film spectatorship by elaborating psychoanalytic constructions' workings of gender and the power of the male gaze. In her early work *Women and Film*, Kaplan argued that "the male gaze, in defining and dominating woman as erotic object, manages to repress the relations of women in her place as Mother, leaving a gap not 'colonized' by man, through which, hopefully, woman can create a discourse, a voice, a place for herself as subject."<sup>24</sup> There and in subsequent work, Kaplan integrated semiotic and psychoanalytic methodologies to reveal the wide-ranging implications of gender construction in and through Hollywood film. She takes psychoanalysis to be a vital methodology in understanding the gendered patterns in Hollywood production processes' inscription of spectators' experience of film. She argues for example,

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<sup>24</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, 1983), 2.

...psychoanalysis becomes a crucial tool for explaining the needs, desires, and male–female positioning that are reflected in film.... What does it mean to be a female spectator? Only through asking such questions with a psychoanalytic framework can we begin to find the gaps and fissures through which we can insert women in a historical discourse that has hitherto been male–dominated and excluded women.<sup>25</sup>

Kaplan's analysis invites consideration of the possibilities for female spectators and their voice, notwithstanding the degree of male dominance (and female exclusion) also seen in the production of *animated* Hollywood films. The filmmakers' increased mediation in the animation process indeed creates the opportunity to further integrate patterns of visual representation that socially and historically shape drawn bodies and environments. Kaplan's discussion of the influence of male spectators proves a significant point in Chapter Three because of the ways that animation allows for even greater control than does live filmmaking over the depicted female body.

Theorizing film's working from a different perspective, Gaylyn Studlar approaches psychoanalytic film theory by placing different emphases on Freud's understanding of human relationships and emotional interactions.<sup>26</sup> In her early work, Studlar sought to account for how film might function for the male as well as the female spectator in ways other than the voyeuristic relationship Mulvey posited between the viewer and the characters and events on screen. Mulvey argues that pleasure in film viewing arises for the male spectator through an

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<sup>25</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

essentially sadistic relationship that the Hollywood narrative establishes between the film viewer as voyeur and the cinematic object of his gaze.

In contrast to Mulvey's argument, Studlar proposes that pleasure in cinema could arise from an imagined masochistic rather than sadistic relationship between the spectator and screen object. Studlar positions her work as breaking the limitations set up by Mulvey's work when she concludes,

Most particularly, by focusing on the pre-Oedipal rather than the Oedipal stage, we can break the impasse inherited from Laura Mulvey's work (among others) on visual pleasure to reach a point whereby film may be capable of forming spectatorial pleasures divorced from issues of castration, sexual difference, and feminine lack.<sup>27</sup>

Studlar takes as a case study Josef von Sternberg's *Blonde Venus*, starring Marlene Dietrich, to demonstrate how visually realized masochistic relations might function in fantasy—and in film viewing. Through structuring a masochistic rather than sadistic position for the viewer, the film arguably positions the spectator as submissive to the controlling female star as a kind of dominant mother figure. Studlar argues that this submissive state can generate pleasure for both male and female spectators, as it develops from a pre-oedipal stage of psychic development.

The brief sketch above of the foundations of especially feminist psychoanalytic approaches to film theory suggests the value of considering gendered spectatorship not only of film viewing generally, but specifically as an approach to understanding film viewers'

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<sup>27</sup> Gaylyn Studlar, "Visual Pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetic," *Journal of Film and Video* 37, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 5. This article is incorporated as a chapter in her book *In The Realm of Pleasure* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1988).



engagement with screen characters. The meanings derived from a film arise in part as a component of both the spectator's gendered position and the projected relations to gendered figures on screen. Most animated characters demonstrate a distinctive gender anchored in the social conventions of the film's period and place of production, like their live action counterparts. Heterosexual romances in film often serve to reinforce common gender expectations such as active assertive male characters and alluring chaste or naive female love interests.

Such romances certainly appear in both animated and live action features of the same period. In the 1959 live action film *Some Like it Hot*, Marilyn Monroe's character, Sugar Kane Kowalczyk, becomes immediately objectified on screen by Tony Curtis' and Jack Lemon's characters, as they along with the camera watch Monroe's hips sashay provocatively through a train station. Monroe's character Sugar and Curtis's Joe become romantically involved after he pursues her doggedly, fulfilling genre expectations of comedy and romance. Similarly, the 1959 Walt Disney version of *Sleeping Beauty*, despite its somewhat distinctive visual style among Disney's animated films, closely resembles in its narrative and characterizations both Disney and other mid-twentieth century romantic American film narratives, especially in the depiction of women. The lead damsel in distress, the lithe, beautiful blond Aurora moves rather directly from the clearly gendered role of gullible virgin daughter to happy bride. She sings and looks pretty, becoming thereby the object of the young prince's and the spectator's voyeuristic gaze. To save his fair helpless damsel, the prince then battles a powerful witch who has turned into a dragon. Both films establish the same narrative expectations, relationships, and gendered positions, even if *Some Like it Hot* plays with those expectations for humorous effect. These two films equally

demonstrate the usefulness of feminist psychoanalytic approaches to analyzing how cinema's gendered character relations structure spectator positions.

Although Mulvey's reference to Hitchcock's films in her much-cited 1975 essay has usually been elaborated with reference to his works that most foreground voyeurism and male sexual anxiety or obsession, like *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1958), the arguments Mulvey makes about the cinematic positioning of the female leads as objects of male contemplation and mastery pertain as well to his romantic thrillers like *North by Northwest* (1959). So, too, do they prove effective in addressing *Sleeping Beauty*. Mulvey describes the relationship in *Vertigo* in terms that can easily be seen in *Sleeping Beauty*.

Scottie's voyeurism is blatant: he falls in love with a woman he follows and spies on without speaking to.... As a result he follows, watches and falls in love with a perfect image of female beauty and mystery. Once he actually confronts her, his erotic drive is to break her down and force her to tell by persistent cross-questioning.<sup>28</sup>

The scene in which Aurora sings until seen by the prince depicts him watching her and following her briefly as she dances and sings in the forest. His love for her emerges from an attraction to her singing voice and her appearance. The prince then also pursues her with questions despite her initial resistance. Both films similarly represent the pursuit of women according to Mulvey's discussion of gender roles in classic Hollywood cinema.

Similarly to those of heterosexual romance, recurrent tropes of fraught maternal relationships often appear in animated as well as live action films. In the classic Disney fairy tales, a stepmother who is often evil usually gets replaced or eliminated once the romance

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<sup>28</sup>Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 13.

develops. Kaplan describes this figure in live action films as the “evil ‘phallic’ or witch mother” and classifies her as one of the types of mothers seen in films such as *Now Voyager* and *Marnie*.<sup>29</sup> Animation films not only distinctively engender characters in familiar socially constructed ways: the mode usually expresses gender quite emphatically through exaggeration, caricature, and other comedic techniques. While often playing with expectations, the comedy frequently reaffirms audience expectations in the form of stereotypes of gender and sexuality.

Mulvey, Haskell, Kaplan, and Studlar all discuss only live action film, but because most animated film characters, whether in human form or not, as I will discuss, manifest gender as well as ethnicity and sexuality, these analyses of representations of power, control, and objectification remain valid for animation to a degree. Feminist psychoanalytic theories do yield insights into animation’s spectators despite the modes differences from animation. Many other theorists have analyzed how film as a media can generate different meanings, depending on the spectators’ extracinematic (rather than textual) sociocultural positioning. Stuart Hall and Christine Gledhill stand out among other influential cultural studies theorists who have argued that film spectators are better envisioned not as gendered strictly (heteroerotically) male or female, but rather as constructed through individuated but ideologically situated perspectives and sociocultural contexts. For Hall and Gledhill, such classed, as well as raced and complexly engendered spectators, participate in the construction of meaning and affect derived through film viewing in ways differently than the spectator proposed by psychoanalytic film theory.

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<sup>29</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 13.

*Cultural Studies Theories of Film Reception*

Attempts to incorporate consideration of specific socio–historical contexts into strategies of closely “reading” cultural productions and events as texts generated the cultural studies approaches that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. An early manifestation of this integrative impulse leading to cultural studies was the so–called Frankfurt School, with which is associated a number of theorists who had links to the University of Frankfurt in the 1920s, including Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Walter Benjamin. It is on the foundations of the Frankfurt School’s Marxist “critical theory of society” that Stuart Hall, among others, built fresh approaches to popular cultural phenomena including cinema.<sup>30</sup> Stuart Hall’s influential intervention arose as he insisted on the relevance of race and gender to popular cultural analyses along with the class issues to which the Frankfurt School theorists most attended.

In his 1973 article “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse,” Hall proposed an approach to understanding cultural constructions that revised two different models of communication. He addressed both the then influential communications model that focused on a flow of information across the “sender– message– receiver” triad, and at the same time the too exclusive focus on the text as the site of meaning formation, discoverable only through semiotic analysis. Hall argued that meaning does not reside in the text nor is it originated by the sender, nor “received” by the reader/spectator, but rather arises in consumer–spectators’ individuated negotiations to apprehend previously unfamiliar textual constructions within familiar cultural

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<sup>30</sup> Phil Slater, “The Aesthetic Theory of the Frankfurt School,” *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 6, Autumn (Nottingham, UK: Russell Press 1974).172-212.

contexts. Each spectator thus “decodes” the meanings of films based on his or her particular social and cultural perspective.

Hall draws implicitly on Antonio Gramsci’s theories of hegemonic cultures in his argument that, as spectators decode, they operate with either a dominant or oppositional code.

When the viewer takes the connoted meaning from, say, a television newscast or current affairs programme, full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been coded, we might say that the viewer is operating inside the dominant code. This is the ideal–typical case of ‘perfectly transparent communication’, or as close as we are likely to come to it ‘for all practical purposes.’<sup>31</sup>

For Hall, a negotiated reading occurs as a person who generally accepts the dominant structures and rules of interpretation may on some occasions for some contexts tend to diverge from the hegemonic standard.

As a part of his analysis of communication, Hall also argues that spectators or readers generate an oppositional interpretation when they do not accept or share a text’s dominant encoding and actively reject the hegemonic reading of that text. Divergent readings of a single text thus arise from the contextual social positions of different television spectators. Hall uses the example of a worker reading a government bill limiting the right to strike, to argue that the “decoder may adopt the hegemonic definition.... This, however, may have little or no relation to his or her willingness to go on strike for better pay and conditions.”<sup>32</sup> While Hall specifically

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<sup>31</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Television Discourse; Encoding and Decoding,” in *Education and Culture*, 25, (1973): 5-51.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

addresses live action television, his analysis of the sociological, cultural, and political significance for spectatorship points to wider implications regarding spectators' perspectives of all media, as subsequent scholars have readily acknowledged and developed.

In a 1988 essay, film scholar Christine Gledhill undertook to revise Hall's tripartite model of spectators' relations to cultural film texts, with a particular focus on film melodrama. She argued for the importance of integrating multiple theoretical methodologies and called for the continued inclusion of "neo-Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis while at the same time challenging the textual determinism and formalism of these approaches in the ideological analyses of the 1970s."<sup>33</sup> Gledhill establishes a position that allows for the possibility of meanings that derive simultaneously from the experience of a particular film, and also to a degree as a construction involving spectator experience, context, and will.<sup>34</sup> She argues specifically,

Meaning is neither imposed, nor passively imbibed, but arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience.

This can be analyzed at three different levels: institutions, texts, and audiences—although distinctions between levels are ones of emphasis rather than rigid separation.<sup>35</sup>

Gledhill's description of spectatorship does not argue for a thoroughgoing acceptance (nor rejection) of a film narrative's meanings as textually constructed, but rather insists that spectators

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<sup>33</sup> Christine Gledhill, "'Pleasurable Negotiations,'" in *Female Spectators*, ed. Pribram, E. Deidre (London: Version, 1988), 68.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-72.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

always mediate a film's readings. Her framework usefully helps to account for how live action films can inspire divergent, even contradictory, interpretations by different audiences.

Another scholar working in theorizing how viewers read humor, which is a typical element of animated films, Jerry Palmer outlines the importance of the relationships between a joke's creator and its audience. He considers, for example, what he calls the logic of the absurd as a means of analyzing when racialized characterizations become offensive.

...[T]he logic of the absurd is capable of producing a series of different subject positions for an audience *vis-à-vis* the butt of the joke. The most effective attacks are likely to be those in which the insulting attribute of the butt is assumed as a precondition of the joke.... But we should add to this that the identity of the speaker and the audience are essential: the audience must accept that what is asserted to be plausible and implausible in fact are such, and refusal to accept this will result in comic failure, often in the form of finding the joke insulting rather than funny.<sup>36</sup>

Palmer's theory argues that ultimately a spectators' awareness of the "teller" of a "joke" informs how the joke is understood. With animation's humor, the fact that an animated character performs the humor may alter the way that spectators will receive jokes. Film's theoretical development which locates the capacity for creating meaning with the spectator has accordingly placed more emphasis on the significance of social or cultural differences among spectators, including gender identity.

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<sup>36</sup> Jerry Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd: On Film and Television Comedy* (London, England: BFI Publishing, 1987), 184-185.

*Theories of Raced Spectatorship*

Many media scholars like Henry Giroux have addressed issues of racially inflected film spectatorship through a focus on films, including animated features, which obviously represent racial differences.<sup>37</sup> Other scholars like bell hooks have sought to combine a study of both texts and audiences, to propose approaches to racially-inflected spectatorship. Richard Dyer has also addressed the question of race in cinema at once on screen and in discursive circulation, most extensively in his book *White*.<sup>38</sup> Dyer's aim in his analysis of race is to situate whiteness as a marked racial representation rather than as a given, unmarked or assumed category. He argues that the normalizing of whiteness renders it invisible and that categories other than clearly Caucasian become bearers of race in a way that whiteness does not: "As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people."<sup>39</sup> Dyer's analysis of the invisibility of whiteness to many spectators is germane to the discussion of animation, in which, as I have already suggested, characters may be raced even if their bodies do not visibly demonstrate characteristics familiar from human racial typing.

Animated depictions of race and gender could be less obvious as the human characters in live action films usually are, because the representations of characters often appear as animals or in an abstracted form. However, exaggerated or camouflaged, cultural cues of race, gender, and

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<sup>37</sup> Henry A. Giroux, *Breaking into the Movies: Film and the Culture of Politics* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Richard Dyer, *White*. (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



social markers do permeate character representation in animation often for comical effect. For example in Disney's 1994 *The Lion King*, which has been criticized as racist, Whoopi Goldberg enacts in her familiar exuberant style the outcast hyena characterized as a streetwise African American stereotype.<sup>40</sup> While a hyena, even an animated one, does not inherently have any social markers for race, many critics read Goldberg's performance as raced.

However, the default "human norm" to which Dyer points also extends to animation, with cultural assumptions generally creating the illusion that Porky Pig, Goofy and Donald Duck are "unraced." Those figures do not demonstrate an obviously (conventionally) *raced* type through markedly "non-standard" accents, mannerisms, behavior, or other characterizations, but as anthropomorphized characters they bear, following Dyers' analysis, "invisible" whiteness. That Porky Pig's racial representation does not receive critical discussion suggests not a lack of race, but rather a presence of "whiteness." Giroux reinforces this point as he specifically remarks on the race of Disney's animated characters "...whiteness is universalized through the privileged representation of middle-class social relations, values, and linguistic practices."<sup>41</sup> Animated figures bearing human characteristics, as do Porky, Goofy and Donald, cannot avoid conveying racial qualities, however invisible, that the animators have distilled from their observations and experiences.

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<sup>40</sup> Henry A. Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010). Giroux criticizes Goldberg's performance as a part of the film's overall racist portrayal of characters that are coded as African American or Hispanic.

<sup>41</sup> Henry A. Giroux, *Breaking into the Movies* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Blackwell, 2002), 121.

bell hooks, a theorist concerned with overarching issues of hegemonic power and control, as well as with cultural cues and implications of raced practice and theory, has explicitly addressed black female spectatorship. In her 1996 book *Reel to Real*, hooks analyzes both black cinematic representations and what she calls the spectators' look back at the film as "a site of resistance for colonized black people globally."<sup>42</sup> Building directly on Hall's theories of hegemonic media messages and counter interpretations, she addresses specifically how black women viewers may resist, criticize, or interrogate mainstream film. hooks' point of departure is her own and often other black women's experiences watching movies, which she presents as perspectives arising from divergent spectatorial engagements: that is, whether, consciously, to bring one's critical awareness to a film's racial representations or seek deliberately to overlook or discount racist representations. "Most of the women I talked with felt that they consciously resisted identification with films," hooks reports, noting further that the tension of doing so "made movie-going less than pleasurable; at times it causes pain."<sup>43</sup> Her discussion of film viewing argues for the capacity of spectators to behave not just consciously, but also conscientiously, in keeping with their overt sense of identity and political commitments.

Although hooks does not posit an inherent position of acceptance or resistance to a film's primary message or identification based on the spectator's race as mentioned above, she does report the perspectives of black female acquaintances who view from an actively engaged approach particularly critical toward racial representations. Indeed, we can observe such a critical viewer in Jacqueline Maloney—herself a media educator – on screen in the documentary

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<sup>42</sup> bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race Sex and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 199.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

*Mickey Mouse Monopoly*.<sup>44</sup> Maloney discusses the representations of African Americans in animated Disney films as limited to animals that perpetuate stereotypes, for example, the crows in *Dumbo* (1941). The level of awareness in spectators may indeed vary greatly depending on experience, cultural and social frames of reference, perspective, and education. These studies of particular spectators illustrate the complex reactions that Hall suggests and incorporate understandings of identifiable groups that for historical or cultural reasons may be more specifically inclined to resist the normative or dominant messages in animated as well as live action films. These resistant responses demonstrate the spectator's agency in interpreting the material and how their different perspectives change meaning in films.

### *Queer Theories of Gendered Spectatorship*

Non-heteronormative gender identity is a key aspect of spectatorial identity that has in recent decades gained attention with reference to live action film viewing particularly from cultural studies perspectives. Just as feminist psychoanalytic theories have focused on issues of male-female gendering on and in front of the screen, so-called queer approaches to cinema have both addressed textual figurations of "queerness" and explored "queered" aspects of spectatorship, including the ways that nonheterosexually identified viewing subjects may distinctly negotiate cinematic signification. Queer theories of spectatorship, I will demonstrate,

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<sup>44</sup> Jacqueline Maloney, interviewed in *Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood & Corporate Power*, directed by Miguel Picker and Chyng Feng Sun (2001; San Diego, CA: Art Media Production, 2001), DVD.

function in viewing animated figures and also prove crucial to grasping the full range of spectators' responses to animated bodies and gender in animation.

The pioneering work of film theorist Richard Dyer also in this area integrates approaches to non-heteronormative gender and to cinema's racial inscriptions with his early influential work in star studies. Dyer's work elaborates Hall's understandings of the varied levels of decoding of a text in particular relation to queer interpretations of texts. Dyer considers classical Hollywood productions in his analysis of the spectatorship of gender and race in film and of star performances. For example, Dyer discusses how spectators' recognition and prior image of a well-known actress such as Rita Hayworth would in 1946 have influenced their interpretation of the somewhat ambiguous moral character and behavior of the central character she plays in the *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946).<sup>45</sup> For the film's original audience, which was likely familiar with Hayworth's public persona and previous films, the conventional *femme fatale* character Gilda becomes knowable through Hayworth's performance. That audience's extradiegetic knowledge of Hayworth thus enables a layered reading of the film's gendered representations, also of the ostensible male hero played by Glenn Ford. Dyer finds in sum that spectators' interpretations may "resist" (in Hall's sense of the term) socially conventional representations of femininity as well as masculinity in a film, based on their prior knowledge of stars' personas along with (or even in opposition to) the film's cinematic elements of characterization (camera framing, dialogue, use of props, and the like).

Dyer's arguments about the impact of audience familiarity with star images obviously do not pertain in the same ways to animation's visual representations. For example, an animated

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Dyer, "Resistance Through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*," in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: The British Film Institute, 1978), 115-122.

figure like Jessica Rabbit in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* has no direct photographic (or “indexical”) relation to a star actress, even though some drawn figures may evoke particular actors, as I discuss in Chapter Four. In the absence of a photographed human body, a film character has no implicit capacity to look (as it were) back at their fans in the film audience. Nor do animated characters usually visibly communicate a known actor’s popular image, although there are some instances of actors (e.g., Robin Williams voicing the genie in *Aladdin* or Eddie Murphy as Mushu in *Mulan*) that arguably influence audience’s perception of those characters. In the absence of an actor’s recognizable image, animated performances have less capacity than those of actors in live action films to introduce visible reminders of extradiegetic contexts.

Another queer theorist of media, Alex Doty, also calls for a complex understanding of spectators who live in media rich environments and thus cannot, and Doty argues, do not interpret film in a vacuum. In similar ways to Dyer and Mayne, Doty asserts in *Making Things Perfectly Queer* that gay audiences “queer” a text through the extra textual knowledge about film stars and directors that is circulated in popular gay discourse. Thus, for Doty, referring to film director Dorothy Arzner, the queer reading “process uses extra textual material as a way of ‘author-izing’ the decoding and reading of certain narrative and style codes in films as specific to lesbian culture.”<sup>46</sup> Doty further argues for understanding film spectatorship as inclusive of many factors of lived experience:

Biographical information about directors (and stars, writers, etc.) and spectators often becomes crucial to examining queer authorship. For queer people on all sides of the camera—before it, behind it, and in the audience—the problem of

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<sup>46</sup> Alex Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 20.

expressing ourselves from our positions as invisible and oppressed ‘minority’ sexual cultures with a hypervisible and pervasive straight culture offers a compelling parallel to auteurship notion that certain studio directors expressed their unconventional views by developing oppositional signs of such oppositional practices, whether intentional or not, would be found in those elements of textual tension and contradiction created through formal emphases—whether narrative or stylistic.<sup>47</sup>

The intersection of representation and spectatorial interpretation thus plays out not only within the film industry but also within the film culture. This notion of authorship requires an understanding of the active spectator but also indicates the significance of the creators of a text to those spectators. These levels of meaning, which for Doty in the case of these queer authors emerge from spectator-perceived “oppositional signs” in the texts, become important when considering the power of authorship in animation. Clearly, to the extent authors of live action film arguably embed signs that foster queer(ed) readings, the fact that director-artists themselves generate characters’ bodies of performances in animation must strengthen the framework for the spectator of a presumed connection of creator to representation.

Doty’s later book *Flaming Classics* extends his analysis of the relationships between what the text presents and spectators’ assumptions about sexuality in different texts. He questions the normative assumptions about femininity or masculinity that shape an understanding of filmic moments. Doty describes his approach at one point as a “radical understanding and use of queerness as ignoring or transcending traditional gender and sexuality

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 26.

classifications....”<sup>48</sup> He calls for rethinking presuppositions and expectations of gender and also racial representations in relation to spectators’ tendency to normalize what they see.

Acknowledging himself as such a spectator, Doty describes a moment watching *Blair Witch Project* and wondering why the filmmakers did not make any of the characters gay, then realizing that they might be gay, but also that as a spectator he had participated in heteronormative discourse, for he had not observed any conventional marks of heterosexuality in the characterizations.<sup>49</sup>

Although cultural studies approaches and particularly queer theories address realizations of gender and gender relations in media, as do feminist psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship in a different way, none of those theoretical approaches necessarily limit themselves to screen representations in live action. Such theoretical approaches do productively elucidate the workings of animation as well as live action film, I will argue, but only with modification. Queer theories of spectatorship prove especially important due to the focus on gendered rather than sexual representation, for queer theories generally challenge any presumed intrinsic connection between sex and gender. Animation as a mode of representation creates characters from inanimate objects and imagined species that may be able to avoid engendering those characters or marking them as sexed. For example, if the dots in McLaren’s film *Dots* (1940) are understood as characters, then their abstraction would seem to lack gender. However, spectators may imbue characters with gender regardless of the mode or level of abstraction. Animals in live action films thus may be read as gendered, especially when they have gendered names and

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<sup>48</sup> Alex Doty, *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Cannon* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 10-11.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

sometimes characterizations and voices. For example, in the film *Babe* (Chris Noonan, 1995), the title character clearly appears gendered as male. Nonetheless such animal engendering only occasionally appears in live action , but is quite common in animation.

Animation, however, regularly makes inanimate objects into gendered characters. For example, Disney's 1991 *Beauty and the Beast* personifies many domestic objects as male and female characters. A duster, tea pot, and wardrobe are voiced and presented as female characters in their domestically feminine representations, at the same time a candelabra and clock are marked as male. Animated characterizations also exhibit gender in any number of ways as in the Nickelodeon film *Barney* (2006), in which several of the animals are clearly drawn as cows with udders, but are nonetheless voiced by men, referred to as "he," and bear names like Otis and Ben. The film does not appear to be attempting to represent transgendered animals, but rather only to disregard the anatomy of a bull or steers for a particular bovine aesthetic. These choices in representing the bodies of male "cows" or the gender of a clock serve as only a few of the most overt examples of animation's absolute ability to manipulate and construct gender. In another example, Canadian animator Norman McLaren's *Hen Hop* (1942) shows a line drawing of a dancing hen that morphs from an egg, to a hen, before changing to random other body parts and abstract shapes. In contrast again, McLaren's film *Dots* (1940) in a somewhat similar style of shapes on a monochromatic background creates images so abstract as to have no bodies or gender at all, but rather to remain dots that appear and move on screen.

In specifically addressing gender in animation, Kevin S. Sandler describes the gendering of animated characters and argues that the very act of anthropomorphism genders animated figures. According to Sandler, "attributing human characteristics to nonhuman objects—naturalizes and normalizes strictly defined gender norms and heterosexuality by engendering



animated characters in exactly the same way we humanize humans.”<sup>50</sup> Sandler draws on Judith Butler’s understanding of gender and its performance to describe how the animated figures manifest gender. Bugs Bunny serves as Sandler’s primary example as a figure that is male, not because he is obviously physically male, but, as Sandler argues, “Bugs Bunny is read as “male” because he exhibits no external characteristics recognizable as “female.”<sup>51</sup> Even when Bugs cross-dresses, the humor that arises from the tension of the unstable gender representation serves to reinforce traditional gender, as “his” behavior is mocked as irreverent. Sandler’s description of anthropomorphized animated characters as necessarily gendered comes into question for animated characters that appear less anthropomorphized like the wild rabbits in *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Sottnick, 1985). Unlike Bugs, the wild rabbits do not walk or move like a person, wear clothes, or have other visible indicators of human gender. Sandler also does not examine the extent to which animators may inscribe gender or spectators may ascribe gender to characters.

Theorists themselves are not immune to attributing gender unawares to animated nonhuman figures. For example, cognitivist Stephen Prince describes the 1986 Pixar short film *Luxo, Jr.*, which shows two lamps interacting with a ball, to argue that human characteristics need be only minimal for spectators to perceive emotion and gender.<sup>52</sup> Prince argues that animators can provide emotion in even very abstracted objects because “... the perception of

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<sup>50</sup> Kevin S. Sandler, “Gendered Evasion: Bugs Bunny in Drag,” in *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation*, ed. Kevin S. Sandler (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 159.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 106-107.

biological motion is hard-wired into observers (and animators as well), who extract from it a wealth of information even when cues are minimal.” He further notes that, “Numerous empirical studies, for example, have demonstrated that viewers can perceive emotions and *even gender identity* in abstract point-light motion displays. [my emphasis]”<sup>53</sup> However, when describing *Luxo, Jr.* in illustration, Prince refers to the bigger lamp as father and child, whereas I perceived the same lamp as a mother.<sup>54</sup> Clearly we are assigning gender to these figures, but we are not necessarily perceiving gender in the same ways. This example reinforces the importance of understanding animated as well as live action film’s signifying process.

Animation’s capacity to generate characters without photographed living bodies does entail an understanding of the mode’s theoretical workings that exceeds what some psychoanalytic film theory as well as gender-focused cultural studies approaches to media can explain. This gap in explanatory power precludes the theories as they stand from fully engaging with animation and bespeaks a need for their adaptation or revision to further explain representation in animation. Similarly, issues of racial representations and its reading by film viewers also require a careful review in relation to animation.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 107.; The studies mentioned here and cited in Prince’s book are R.D. Walk and C.P. Homan, “Emotion and Dance in Dynamic Light Displays,” *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society* 22 (1984): 437-440; W.H. Dittich, T. Troscianko, S. Lea, and D. Morgan, “Perception of Emotion from Dynamic Point-Light Displays Represented in Dance,” *Perception* 25 (1996): 727-738.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 106.

## Cognitive Theories of Film Viewing

Film scholarship approaches like psychoanalytic and cultural studies of film have focused on understanding the varied interpretations of film that may arise through personal experiences and ideologies. Thereby, according to Mayne, those taking psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches have tended to distrust more empirical approaches to understanding film. Mayne describes the latter trends as approaches “meant to correct, challenge, and revise what has been perceived as the monolithic and homogeneous spectator...” or any account of spectatorship that does not incorporate an obvious awareness of difference in spectators and spectatorship.<sup>55</sup> In that formulation in 1993, Mayne was critiquing the work that had appeared in the 1980s by scholars like David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, who had turned to cognitive psychology and linguistics to explain film perceptions. Mayne describes cognitive studies as holding a position that “film theorists have assumed too quickly an ideological status for film viewing, one less reliant on the specific films and film-going practices themselves than on the nature of film viewing in general.”<sup>56</sup> Such approaches to understanding spectators and spectatorship do diverge, with cognitive studies taking more narrowly mental “cognitive” rather than psychic emotional perception as its area of study. As I will address more fully in Chapter Two, counter to my initial assumption, perceptions of film do seem remarkably comparable, even arguably having identical processes for both live action and animated film.

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<sup>55</sup> Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 55.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

*Cognitive Theories Addressing Perceived Realism in Cinema*

An important difference between live action and animation arises from spectators' perception of animation's realism, or, more to the point, its lack of realism. Long before the rise of cognitive film theory, diverse film theorists analyzed spectators' impressions of the constructed realism and their perception of such realism in live action film. One such theorist who remains important is André Bazin. Among many issues he addresses in his essays within *What is Cinema*, Bazin examines how spectators may approach different modes of representation.<sup>57</sup> Bazin does not consider aesthetic variation or experience directly, but, in discussing painting and photography, he compares differing modes' relationship to realism.<sup>58</sup> For Bazin, distinctions between the modes of live action and animation differ largely due to the degree of correlation between what spectators see on screen and their experience of the world. I would by extension suggest that especially hand drawn and claymation animation appear aesthetically different from live action film enough for virtually all spectators to recognize the animated films as distinct.

Bazin recounts the freedom painting acquired after the invention of photography: "Freed from the 'resemblance complex,' the modern painter abandons it to the masses who, henceforth, identify resemblance on the one hand with photography and on the other with the kind of painting which is related to photography."<sup>59</sup> According to Bazin, the power of photography often

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<sup>57</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema*, trans. Hugh Gray (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

arises from its tie to the world in which we live or to the object of the photograph. In contrast, painting is the object itself. For Bazin, although both modes of imagery and their realism differ in their impact, they both contain a certain degree of influence and power over the spectator. Similar to the paintings discussed, traditional cel animation lacks the capacity to look like live action, but the presence of live action has allowed animation to demonstrate an art and creativity distinctly different from live action. Even while some companies such as Disney have worked hard to achieve verisimilitude, spectators find no difficulty in differentiating the hand drawn animation work from live action film. However, in recent years with the improvements of computer animation, attempts to appear “live” have made discerning the process of animation more difficult for spectators.

The inability of spectators to distinguish visually among different modes of film has altered their perception of its realism, especially for very realistic seeming computer animation. Stephen Prince defines “perceptual realism” as the effect of screen images that structurally correspond “to the viewer’s audiovisual experience of three dimensional space.”<sup>60</sup> Prince’s 2004 article “True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory” usefully addresses the significance of the term “realism” with reference to film spectatorship by categorizing different kinds of filmic realism, with particular attention to the sense of realism in perception. Prince considers specifically how computer images in a largely live action film like *Jurassic Park* may create perceptual realism. The computer-generated visual elements of a film can, he argues, generate perceptual realism by creating a compelling, effective reference to the profilmic world.

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<sup>60</sup> Stephen Prince, “True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory,” in *Film Theory and Criticism Sixth Edition*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2004), 277.

The closer the computer animation approximates several elements of viewing live action films, the more realistic it will seem to the viewers. The aspects of visual realism that Prince considers necessary to approximate the profilmic world are motion, texture, and lighting.<sup>61</sup>

Prince argues that if those three elements effectively mimic our perception of live action film's representation of the world, then spectators can find that these experiences give the realistic impression they customarily receive from a live action film. That is, Prince argues that representations of light, movement, and texture do not necessarily have to correlate directly to the spectators' experience of the world to generate perceptual realism. Rather, such representations need only persuasively to approximate specific elements of visual information that spectators may extrapolate from lived experience or previously viewed representations. Prince refers to the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* as "referentially fictional but perceptually realistic."<sup>62</sup> He identifies a spectator's ability to perceive a dinosaur as realistic, despite spectators knowing that the sense of realism they get from watching *Jurassic Park*'s dinosaurs cannot arise from the images' proximity to live dinosaurs or live action footage. Rather, for Prince, the *Jurassic Park* dinosaurs are perceptually real because they realize the approximate lighting, movement, and texture of things in the world, which people imagine to be like dinosaurs, like lizards or birds.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, while dinosaurs in a film may seem *perceptively* real, the representations cannot suggest *narrative* realism, in view of spectators' awareness that dinosaurs suffered extinction.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 277.

Prince's recent book *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema* shifts to addressing the ways that actors and their performances become incorporated into digital visual effects, including animation, and how those effects may become "uncanny." While Prince does not specifically address Freud in reference to his understanding of the "uncanny," the term is commonly associated with Freud.<sup>64</sup> Prince describes three ways that an actor can become animated either as "composited with animation," digital motion capture, or through "the animator who creates a digital character performs as an actor."<sup>65</sup> He argues that effects may generate an "uncanny valley," a circumstance which becomes an issue for perception when a "...threshold is crossed where the imitation becomes so close and exacting that its remaining incompleteness points to its status as a surrogate, as something not real, [which] results in a loss of empathy from viewers, a pulling back, as what had seemed so familiar becomes defamiliarized."<sup>66</sup> Prince's examples for this phenomenon include the animation in *The Polar Express* (Robert Zemeckis, 2004) and *Beowulf* (Robert Zemeckis, 2007). For Prince, the photo-realism of characters in these films does not encourage character engagement but interferes with a sense of understanding. Prince goes on to describe Disney and Pixar's use of caricature as an example of animators who have chosen stylistic exaggeration to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of the uncanny.

The perception of realism has stood as one of the most identifiable distinctions between animation and live action, and yet the capacity of animation to appear photorealistic has

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<sup>64</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. XVII. trans. by James Strachey (London: Random House, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> Stephen Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 7.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

increased in recent years. While near photorealism may create some characters that elicit a sense of the uncanny from viewers, the development also changes the significance of realism from a descriptor defining animation to one that can define *some* animation. I return to discussing theorists' approaches to addressing realism in Chapter Two in relation to animation, which I argue in this dissertation has not yet been systematically theorized, even as animation gets discussed to some degree as an artistic product.

### *Cognitive Approaches Concerning Engagement and Sympathy in Film Viewing*

Given the inherent differences between live action and animation in representing characters on screen, one might expect that the animated characters that exhibit no visual indexical connection to a person or star would not evoke strong viewer response or identification. But that logical expectation does not bear out. Some theories of engagement describe how live action film encourages spectator sympathy and engagement with film characters through many visual and narrative factors. The two terms primarily used in film theory when discussing the spectators' interaction or connection to characters on screen are identification and engagement. Scholars working in psychoanalytic film theory as well as those working in cultural studies or gender focused theories of film have commonly used the term identification. The term identification is in fact ubiquitous in the common lexicon of filmgoers as they discuss their experiences of film. For example, British theorist Berys Gaut, who generally positions himself as a cognitivist, argues for the use of this term because of its common understanding and definition. He states that,



This suspicion of the notion of identification by theorists influenced by analytic philosophy and cognitive science is striking, given the widespread use of it in ordinary viewers' reports of their interactions with films, and indeed the use of the notion more generally in ordinary life, as when we talk of identifying with our friends.<sup>67</sup>

While Gaut's arguments are compelling for keeping with the term "identification," with the complications and limitation brought from the word's application in psychoanalytic film theory, the term does not seem to encompass as broad an understanding of character relationships as the term "character engagement."

Engagement does not carry with it the same psychoanalytic implications or the common usage, but it does encompass sympathy and empathy, as cognitivist theorists seek to avoid some previous theoretical entanglements. The term engagement also circumvents the theoretical implications raised by imagining oneself as another person. Murray Smith describes his use of the term engagement as a broader definition than identification, in proposing that "fictional narrations elicit three levels of imaginative engagement with characters, distinct types of responses normally conflated under the term 'identification.' Together, these levels of engagement comprise the 'structure of sympathy.'"<sup>68</sup> Smith critically engages with what he considers several of the misrepresentations that have arisen in understanding film identification.

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<sup>67</sup> Berys Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 254.

<sup>68</sup> Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 75.

One such misconception about identification for him is the notion that spectators become one with the characters on screen.

Other understandings that Smith finds false include the belief that in identification a spectator “mistakes a representation for an actual referent.”<sup>69</sup> Another is what Smith describes as the spectator “centrally imagining while never mistaking representation for referent.”<sup>70</sup> I argue that spectator relationships with characters arise through a structure of *sympathy*, which includes recognition, alignment and allegiance. I find that these terms can helpfully establish the parameters of spectator interactions with animated characters.

In 1990, Noël Carroll laid the groundwork for establishing a cognitive understanding of character engagement in his work *The Philosophy of Horror*.<sup>71</sup> Carroll developed a theory of spectators’ relationships with characters that departs from observations of spectators’ fear in watching horror films despite knowing that they are safe in a theater and that the events are fictional. Carroll challenges the use of the term identification as deeply problematic, outlining concerns with different implied meanings of character identification. Carroll does not contradict some of the most basic connotations that the term may have for spectators, for example, when “identifying” might mean liking a character or recognizing some similarities the spectator might have with the character. But Carroll does find problems with understandings of identification as implying that there is an illusion that the spectator is in the film, the spectator is the protagonist, or that the spectator believes him or herself to be identical to the character. Generally, Carroll’s

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

arguments against these possible forms of identification rely on experiential counterexamples that demonstrate that the audience does not physically or emotionally reflect the character's experience directly. For example, spectators do not generally attempt to dodge bullets shot on screen, and central characters may express emotions like guilt or shame that the audience does not then share on their behalf.

For Carroll, the spectator “assimilates the situation” on screen, which “involves having a sense of the character's internal understanding of the situation” and also “features of the situation that for various reasons are not focused by the protagonist either because she does not know about them or because they are not plausible objects of her concern.”<sup>72</sup> Carroll's explanation of how horror films frighten audiences thus grounds those fears in the spectator's ability to understand the situation happening to the character, but does not necessarily require that the spectator believe that the situation exists or even could happen to him or her. Carroll asserts this function of engagement in his criticism of the term identification, for he argues that the term can suggest “a very radical sort of egoism—viz., that I can only be emotionally moved by situations that pertain to my own self-interests...”<sup>73</sup> Instead, for Carroll “there is abundant evidence that people actually do respond emotionally to situations where there is no plausible connection to their own interests.” Carroll's alternate suggestion of spectators “assimilating the situation” does not require a belief that the situation could happen to the spectator. I would extrapolate that the fact that animated environments do not resemble the profilmic world which spectators see themselves inhabiting does not inhibit engagement, for spectators do not need to imagine themselves in such animated spaces to become engaged with a character.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 94.

In the work, *Engaging Characters*, Smith explains a structure for understanding spectators' relationship with characters on screen, to establish which components of the cinematic experience can create the possibility of engagement. Smith develops what he calls a "person schema" to define what he believes will construct an engaging character.<sup>74</sup> This schema includes seven different elements that make figures on screen a character: a body; actions and self-awareness; intents, beliefs and desires; emotions; language; self-impelled actions and self-interpretation, and traits. Smith proposes that *recognition*, *alignment* and *allegiance* are the requirements for a character to establish the possibility of engagement. Smith bases his sense of recognition on at least a somewhat continuous recognizable figure that the spectator can identify as a particular entity. *Alignment* is a perspective that occurs when the spectator associates with a character for some portion of the film, which films can accomplish through camera angles or narrative point of view. *Allegiance* includes the emotional connection to a character usually marked with sympathy, empathy, or dislike of a particular character. However, while this schema may explain a character, it does not make a character engaging. Rather, the schema merely establishes the possibility of engagement. The elements that make a body with intent and emotions someone who establishes engagement create a greater resemblance to recognizable humanity.

Smith only touches on a primary understanding of what characteristics manifest themselves on screen as marks of race, gender, age, and sexuality. These elements which signal human traits relate to categories through which people classify themselves as similar to other people. Consequently those elements also exist as the markers of difference which underlie the establishment of the "other" and underpin most discrimination. Filmmakers as well as spectators

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 21.

may construct their understanding of a character and establish the possibility of emotional investment or engagement primarily through these elements. To demonstrate issues concerning audience engagement with characters, Smith mentions “Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* or some of the photographs of Cindy Sherman, which present the viewer with legible facial expressions....”<sup>75</sup> In such work the authors imply a belief in audience engagement with drawn figures.

The discussion here of engagement allows me now to consider the scope of characters available for engagement and the possible ramifications of animated figures that are not anchored in the appearance of a human actor. I find that cognitive analysis provides a current psychological understanding of some elements of film viewers’ experiences. Especially in the area of character engagement, cognitive analyses serve as a point of comparison to understand the modes’ similarities. In Chapter Two, I further examine cognitive theoretical approaches to account for the experience of several films that share the same basic narrative yet represent these narratives in different modes. There I demonstrate that character engagement encompasses animation as well as live action and arguably reveals the powerful similarities in the two visually divergent modes. Yet cognitive approaches cannot account for all experiences with film. I argue in Chapter Three that psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches to film better account for how animation does recreate somewhat different experiences than live action film. I thus aim in the balance of the dissertation to demonstrate that some theories do function for animation films while others need modification.

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<sup>75</sup> Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters*, 101.

## Chapter Two:

### Perceiving Realism and Engaging with Characters:

#### How Cognitive Film Theories Pertain to Animation

The visual aesthetics of animation rarely appear to approximate the world in which we live. Despite the absence of such representations, audiences do appear to feel emotion while viewing hand drawn and digitally reproduced animals, toys, people, and machines. Anecdotally, we see that when Bambi's mother gets shot or Ponyo gets separated from her human friend, audiences appear to react emotionally. Viewers frequently laugh or cry while watching the experiences of animated characters, even very abstract or unlikely figures. For example, the aforementioned short film *Luxo Jr.* quite successfully encourages sympathy for a small lamp playing with a rubber ball. One can observe as an audience member of almost any animated film that the sounds of the viewers' gasps, laughter, or sighs seem very similar to those evoked by live action works. This reaction appears to demonstrate how a sense of character engagement does not necessitate that all elements of a character create an impression of realism.

Engagement with characters fundamentally shapes the ways that spectators interact with film. Theorists define the relationship that arises for a spectator watching film characters variously as engagement, identification, sympathy, or empathy. These relationships encourage heightened emotional reactions about films' figures and events, while film narratives position viewers to feel and embrace leading characters. For example, when viewing the 2006 James Bond film directed by Martin Campbell, *Casino Royal*, no one sheds a tear when Bond's enemies die by the dozens, yet some may weep when Vesper Lynd, the Bond girl (Eva Green), dies. Spectators, by design, engage and care about some characters on screen and not others,

demonstrating the direction and control of the filmmaker to create or limit engagement. Not all films establish engagement, and engagement does not always evoke significant emotion, but when it does, the state of being engaged can elicit compassion for fictional characters.

Spectators' engagement with characters results from the complexity of filmic effects and narrative elements. Traditional Hollywood films typically create a strong impression of psychological realism that combines with narrative structure to evoke character engagement and sympathy. I will argue that while filmic characters do not need to seem believably real in all ways, particular components of realism foster engagement. I will integrate understandings of filmic realism and engagement as developed by several film theorists for live action film, introduced in the previous chapter, to analyze how these reactions may function in animation. Animation's popular reception demonstrates that spectators can deeply engage with characters that do not appear aesthetically like humans in the lived world. To experience character engagement, however, spectators may require narrative structures that evoke certain aspects of realism to generate sympathy as well as character development.

Theorists addressing engagement and identification in film have to date not fully elaborated implications of their theories for spectatorship of animated films. In this chapter, I analyze two key elements of spectator engagement. I address realism and sympathy, as both are central ways spectators perceive and appreciate film. A combination of the factors will illuminate issues raised by differences between animation and live action. Looking at a single narrative represented in different modes allows for a focused exploration of the modes themselves.

I begin the analysis by comparing three versions (two animated, one live action) of the classic children's tale *The Velveteen Rabbit or How Toys Become Real* with respect to the works' construction of a sense of narrative or perceptual realism for spectators. The comparison between

versions of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, is itself a narrative that centered on what “real” means, illuminates how the construction of perceptual realism, as outlined by Stephen Prince, may affect spectators’ emotional interaction with a film. What makes *The Velveteen Rabbit* films so useful to analyzing realism is that they all attempt to convey the important narrative difference between a rabbit that is perceptibly real and one that is not real through adapting visual realism. These films demonstrate a range of cinematic techniques to generate an effect of realism within a single narrative such that they illustrate cinematic markers of realism across several modes of film.

In the second part of the chapter, I address how a live action film compared to an animated version of *The Secret Garden* variously evoke emotional engagement, especially sympathy. In analyzing several theories of spectator engagement by cognitive theorists such as Murray Smith, Carl Plantinga and Noël Carroll, in relation to two different versions of a single narrative, *The Secret Garden*, I continue to examine different narrative representational choices and their implication on character engagement especially the development of sympathy. *The Secret Garden*’s representation in animation and live action (without mixing modes) and its singular narrative, about a young girl discovering sympathy as she learns to love and be loved, provides the basis for a close examination of the ways the mode itself may impact spectatorship.

### *Impressions of Realism in Three Animated Versions of The Velveteen Rabbit*

Film theorists have defined the real, realism, and reality multiple times, but for the purpose of this chapter I will engage only with a few specific definitions of the term. One understanding arises from Stephen Prince’s explanation of how aesthetics create a visual impression of realism; another understanding focuses on spectators’ perception of filmic worlds



as real, authentic or genuine in a way that conveys a similarity between the filmic representation and the world in which we live.<sup>76</sup> Prince's definition ties visual realism to the world in which we live, or generally what amounts to animation's visual proximity to traditional live action film. The notion of realism as authenticity arises from a more abstract or emotional reaction to a film's ability to connect its narrative, characters, or form to an emotional touchstone or memory. Yet another definition of real that I will integrate includes the two understandings of real as expressed in the book *The Velveteen Rabbit*. The story relates the word "real" both to being loved and also to being made a biological animal rather than a toy.

Prince argues in "True Lies" that the definition of perceptual realism is a visual impression that the images seen on screen structurally correspond "to the viewer's audiovisual experience of three dimensional space."<sup>77</sup> The computer-generated visual elements of a film can, Prince argues, generate perceptual realism by creating a compelling, effective reference to the profilmic world. The closer the computer animation approximates these specific elements of viewing live action films, the more realistic it will seem to the viewers. The aspects of visual realism that Prince considers necessary to approximate the profilmic world include motion, texture, and lighting.<sup>78</sup> He argues that if the three elements he names effectively mimic our perception of live action film's representation of the world, then spectators can find that these experiences give the realistic impression they have become accustomed to from a live action film. He argues that representations of light, movement, and texture do not necessarily have to correlate to anything in the "real world" to generate perceptual realism, but only persuasively to

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<sup>76</sup> Prince, "True Lies," in *Film Theory and Criticism Sixth Edition*, 277.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

approximate elements of visual information that viewers may extrapolate from lived experience or previously viewed representations.

Prince's definition of perceptual realism usefully elucidates the complex relationship between animatronics, computer generated imagery, and a spectators' fear of dinosaurs. Perceptual realism still informs how these concepts provide insight into a simple child's story with a clear message about love and hope. The classic children's story *The Velveteen Rabbit or How Toys Become Real* relates the tale of a stuffed rabbit that becomes "real" through the love of a young boy. This notion of "real" encompasses both the state of being loved into realness and also becoming an animal rather than just a toy, albeit a conscious one. Written by English-American author Margery Williams and originally published in London in 1922 in an edition illustrated by William Nicholson, *Velveteen* gives the perspective of a toy rabbit given to a young boy for Christmas. A "skin" horse in the nursery befriends the new toy and convinces the rabbit that if the boy loves him enough, he will become more real than any of the mechanical toys and games. What can be interpreted as the boy's imagination makes the rabbit seem to move independently and almost magically when the boy plays with him. The rabbit soon becomes the boy's favorite toy, but when the boy contracts scarlet fever, his parents plan to burn the rabbit to prevent contagion. The rabbit cries a tear as the rubbish heap starts to flame, causing a fairy to appear and make him as real as the rabbits living in the woods. This moment serves as the only explicitly magical element of the film, aside from the toy's consciousness in general. This classic motif of toys coming to life appears not only in numerous adaptations of *The Velveteen Rabbit* made as recently as 2009, but also in similarly themed blockbuster films such as the *Toy Story* series. The *Velveteen Rabbit* adaptations have not achieved the reception of *Toy Story*, but are

nonetheless of interest for the ways they show the rabbit becoming “real” not only for the character of the boy, diegetically, but also for the viewers of the films.

The three versions of *The Velveteen Rabbit* I analyze in this Chapter all illustrate the issue of what or who makes an object seem perceptually realistic or emotionally realistic. In the story, a good fairy enables the toy to escape a fire by making it a real animal rabbit that can run away, yet only the boy, essentially his spectator, and his love can make the rabbit’s transformation possible. The three film versions of the tale visually demonstrate different means of addressing the experience of “realness” and an impression of visual realism. The fantastic nature of the story allows it to address realism in a visual way by directly comparing different forms of the rabbit. The story’s core—the relationship that develops between the boy and the rabbit he imaginatively brings to life—offers a fitting metaphor for the relationship between a spectator and an animated film. We, the spectators, make the films we view emotionally real in that our engagement makes them more than lights, patterns, and sound waves; within the course of viewing, spectators experience the cinematic images and sounds as meaningfully real. My comparison of different film versions of *The Velveteen Rabbit* thus focuses on how animation techniques and styles structure a viewer’s sense of what is “real” in a film. I argue that factors which shape a spectator’s perception of a film narrative and viewing experience as “real” include the directorial choices in use of sound and animated visual aesthetics, and, in sum, the degree of representational consistency established within each narrative.

The three animated versions of *The Velveteen Rabbit* all bear the same title but range in visual style from the abstract to “realistic,” including a live action–animation mix. The different means of showing the rabbit’s physical realism through different indicators of perceptual realism thus allow a useful comparison. The analysis of the distinctive forms, styles, and representations

of realism yield insight into the significance of consistency and expectations of realist representation on spectators' film reception. I first consider the thirty-minute-long limited hand-drawn animated version directed by Mark Sottnick in 1985, then address a twenty-seven minute-long claymation version directed by Lindsay Van Blerk in 2005. The third version, directed by Michael Landon, Jr. in 2009, is an eighty-eight minute feature that combines a mix of live action, cel, and computer-generated animation. The order of discussion follows the chronology but also the films' degree of approach toward conventions of narrative realism as rooted in live action cinema. I will establish each particular mode of animation's relationship to filmic realism to assess the possible impact of "internal consistency" of styles on viewer engagement.

Mark Sottnick's 1985 animated short version of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, which features the voice of Meryl Streep, closely follows the original story of the rabbit and his owner, both narratively and in dialogue which largely stems from the book.<sup>79</sup> This animated film makes no attempt to mimic motion like Disney-style animated films and otherwise seems to focus on establishing an emotional connection rather than approximating live action or lifelike movement. It animates still drawings by holding shots for several seconds between dissolves and otherwise using a "pan and scan" technique, where the camera zooms into and away from the drawings which adds to the impression of motion on screen. This drawn animation version of *The Velveteen Rabbit* appears as the least visually realistic of the three versions of the film, because

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<sup>79</sup> *The Velveteen Rabbit*, directed by Mark Sottnick (1985; South Norwalk, CT: Rabbit Ears Productions/Random House Home Video, 2003), DVD. This film is a half-hour version originally made for television, although it can now be purchased on DVD, CD (just the narration and music), and has been available as streaming video on the Internet.

the film's slow transitions does not generally give the illusion of the images moving, the drawings lack of apparent physical depth, and they express a highly stylized aesthetic.

This limited animation version of *The Velveteen Rabbit* offers none of what Stephen Prince calls "perceptual realism." In this film, the use of motion does not mimic how spectators perceive movement in the profilmic world, and this stylistic choice limits the film's perceptual realism. However, even the limited animation suggests an illusion of some approximation of visually realistic movement through differences in the actions of the velveteen rabbit with the living rabbits that appear late in the story. This effect occurs when the (drawn) velveteen rabbit encounters (also drawn) living rabbits in the woods. While the lighting remains the same as live action, two other indicators of perceptual realism in Steven Prince's taxonomy, namely motion and texture, do shift and have the effect of making the "living" rabbits seem more perceptually realistic to the spectator than the toy one. Animators have drawn the form and texture of the woodland rabbits differently than the velveteen rabbit's image. That toy figure has no hind feet, nor does the drawn texture of his velveteen coat appear as fuzzy as the fur of the living rabbits. Within the film's narrative, the texture significantly indicates the more natural or real state of the animal rabbits in contrast with the construction or mediated manifestation of the fabric toy, even though both textures are equally animated and constructed. The real or animal nature of these rabbits appears through Prince's markers of visual realism for an animal.

While the spectator sees no page turning between the overall slow-paced sequence of images in this film, the drawings resemble a common style of children's book illustration. The drawings use soft pastel colors and tones on largely white backgrounds with a minimum of detail. This style of animation may elicit nostalgia for being read to as a child. The aesthetic of the colored pencil illustrations does not resemble the first edition of the book, but rather evokes

other early 20<sup>th</sup> century illustrations like *Peter Rabbit* or the original drawings of *Winnie the Pooh*. The period style drawings that suggest these culturally familiar icons of childhood literature reinforce the notion that this film seeks to create an experience of reading, especially reading books with a sentimental or nostalgic feeling. While also in pastels, the original *Velveteen Rabbit* illustrations have a more exaggerated edgy quality different from the softer and rounder images used for the film. Knowledge of the stylistic change from the original illustrations makes even more evident the film's nostalgic tone, achieved in its use of drawings of an early twentieth century graphic style which reads as original. In a style also familiar from children's book illustrations, the camera zooms seem to focus the attention of the viewer, to provide more detail as the larger image appears closer. This impression that the film resembles a book builds on the commonplace that a narrative need not appear visually realistic to captivate audiences; indeed, as we certainly experience in reading books that contain no illustrations, we can engage in a narrative without the use of visuals at all. The 1985 version of *The Velveteen Rabbit* relies largely on a consistent pacing of camera motion to establish a compelling sense of movement that appears arguably realistic on its own terms. The same perception of realism one experiences in memory and dreams—in this instance, the recollection of being read to as a child—may evoke a viewer's sense of this film's style of animation as emotionally or nostalgically realistic, in a way quite divergent from the perceptual or narrative realism attempted by more traditional Hollywood-style animation.

Most of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, given the time that lapses between separate shots, does not suggest any illusion of movement, even though the spectator receives a general impression of change or movement in the story. The only moment in the film when the shots move fast enough to give an illusion of motion comes toward the end, when the toy velveteen rabbit meets the

animal rabbits in the woods and discovers that he is not real in the same way that they are—and more importantly, comes to understand what “real” means. While the images even here do not approach a speed of moving at twenty–four frames per second, the still shots of the rabbits shown to be dancing speed up, making their movements appear almost natural. At this moment, the film establishes a contrast between the animal and the toy rabbits. The animals appear to move in a way closer to live action films. This movement marks part of the difference that the Velveteen Rabbit character envies. In this scene, movement symbolizes the rabbit’s physical realism for the spectator in a film that uses a minimum of movement.

Although the 1985 *Velveteen Rabbit* does not communicate “perceptual realism,” the spectator does not necessarily miss a realistic style. The film’s visually non–realistic animation techniques can nonetheless charm and engage the spectator in the central character’s struggle to find love and meaning. Here Richard Neupert’s essay is germane for its analysis of how spectators engage in even the simplest animation, especially its characters. Neupert demonstrates in his analysis of the 1998 French animated film *Kirikou and the Sorceress*, directed by Michel Ocelot, that the absence of an illusion of three dimensional space does not impede viewer engagement with the characters; rather, the world in *Kirikou and the Sorceress* creates spectatorial engagement and a sense of believability despite the images’ lack of visual depth.<sup>80</sup>

Neupert also specifically considers the importance of motion in relation to Etienne Souriau’s discussion of how motion and sound in a film create or possibly displace the perceptual expectation of depth or spatial volume. The film he analyzes and the 1985 limited animated version of *The Velveteen Rabbit* similarly demonstrate that a lack of depth does not

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<sup>80</sup> Richard Neupert, “Kirikou and the Animated Figure/Body,” *Studies in French Cinema* 8.1 (2008): 9,41-56.

interfere with our engagement with the characters or acceptance of the visual space in itself. *The Velveteen Rabbit* does remain stylistically consistent throughout and thereby maintains its own illusion of a fantastic world, even if the film does not as strongly create an impression of the world in which we live. The spectator of *The Velveteen Rabbit* comes to expect an absence of space or depth. The viewer does not miss the landscape, because the images and narrative focus on the characters and their actions while the film never introduces a detailed landscape for spectators to miss later. The received realism of this film does not rely on spatial similarities to our world, but rather much more on narrative and auditory techniques.

The limited animated version of *The Velveteen Rabbit* also invites spectators to experience voice very intimately. Animation evokes a simulacrum of reality in part through recorded sound produced from noises and voices in technologically the same way as for live action film. The emotional responses and acting conveyed by a voice performer generates a sense of the human comparable to the use of voices in live action, even if not linked in illusion to a particular photographed body. Film audiences thus experience the communication of personality and other markers of humanity in the recorded voice in ways very similar to that in live action film. Particularly the use of voice in this version of the 1985 *Velveteen Rabbit* plays a vital role in creating the feeling of the rabbit's world being realistic. Meryl Streep's presence as narrator in this work provides a familiar situation, again, similar to that of the experience of reading a book as a child, and also a certain level of credibility for those viewers who recognize Streep's voice.

For such viewers (admittedly, mostly adults, probably parents watching with their children), Streep's familiar audial presence and tone may communicate a reassuring sense of education and accomplishment in an accessible standard American accent. While the film uses



Margery Williams' original text, Streep's delivery of it lends the words a personalized aura and mediation through performance that the physical book cannot. She alters her tone and pitch for the different characters and for movements of emotional excitement or strain, her voice lending the story personality and mood. Streep's voice contributes sound and a familiar personality to the film establishing a human element for the abstracted visual space. In having Streep do voices for all characters combined with only background music, the film uses a limited sound narration which complements the movement's limited animation. This approach communicates the impression that Streep is reading the book to us. This feeling of a storybook lends the work an aura of quaintness and sophistication that the other versions do not demonstrate.

Non-diegetic music also arguably works in the same way in animated and live action film, guiding the spectator's emotions toward the events in the film. The directed experience can include a myriad of emotions including fear, excitement, sorrow, anxiety, or melancholy. In this version of the story, the music as well as Streep's voice supports the images evocation of childhood memories and youthful imagination. The music sounds relatively quiet and unobtrusive, but it creates a pleasing ambient noise that would otherwise seem conspicuously missing. The predominance of soft piano music helps the rabbit's story seem sentimental and sweet.

In sum, the film does not aim to communicate a realistic work, but rather to evoke realistically the experience of having a book read to us by a loved one. The consistency of this style and the film's simplicity throughout appeals to a nostalgic aesthetic of children's literature and the spectators' memory or imagined reality of being read to. The way the film establishes viewer expectations through its stylistic consistency and its thematic fictive engagement with the imaginary enables it to represent the unreal as realistic. The film arguably succeeds in engaging

audiences in part because it conveys, with minimal means the realism of the story visually, aurally, but especially emotionally.

Like the 1985 short, the 2003 Clay Classics production of *The Velveteen Rabbit* directed by Lindsay Van Blerk follows the original book's narrative closely.<sup>81</sup> Consisting entirely of sculpted figures filmed in stop action, this claymation realization of the tale does illustrate how animation techniques of movement, lighting, and texture may evoke a sense of perceptual realism for viewers as Prince suggests. Claymation animators construct movement similarly to both drawn and computer animation, in that the artists create sequentially altered single frames. Historically in much claymation, the motion may have appeared as jerky and awkward such that it creates an impression of falseness. However, given the consistency of the technique and frame of audience expectations, even these elements can work effectively as part of a given film's aesthetic. Not all claymation exhibits rough motion, for animators have altered technologies and techniques (including shooting a larger number of shots for each movement).

The Clay Classics version of *The Velveteen Rabbit* appears quite smooth and the constructed motion, while not approaching live action movement, does not distract spectators from the narrative. That is, even if the claymation version is not logically convincing enough to establish engagement, it does create a continuity of interest that can foster such engagement. The spectator can accept the style and rhythm of movement in the film in part because of its consistency. Spectators perceive the falseness of the stop motion more acutely when films juxtapose stop motion animation and live action images. The 1933 version of *King Kong*, for

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<sup>81</sup> *The Velveteen Rabbit*, directed by Lindsay Van Blerk (2003; Clay Classics/Adelante Project, 2003), DVD. This version is a 27-min. work that appears in DVD release (only, with no known television broadcast), and is often packaged with other Clay Classics's productions.

example, integrates the primarily live action footage with occasional stop motion shots of an armature covered in rabbit fur, which to many contemporary viewers looks impossibly—even ludicrously—false. The disruption in *King Kong*'s impression of realism does not necessarily destroy the film's capacity to create an impression of the real, which is established through other elements like the heroine's character. However, such disruptions can hinder potential engagement with the animated creature or the situation. The consistent stop motion animation in the *Velveteen Rabbit*, by contrast, establishes a diegesis with its own self-contained existence and pacing. The conventions of representing realism from the outset of the film thus sets the terms of movement and spatial consistency and generates the impression of realism in the narrative world despite its lack of resemblance to live action representation.

Claymation diverges from the modes of production and visual effects particularly of hand-drawn animation in that the technique can more readily create depth through lighting and photography. This version of *The Velveteen Rabbit* establishes bright scenes of an entirely clay world full of primary colors and friendly seeming settings. Of course, in traditional cel animation, the hand of the artist imagines and constructs the effects of light and depth, while lighting for claymation reflects off the objects and into the camera, as in live action filming.

Claymation lighting, which entails the deliberate positioning and filtering of lights to create specific effects, can achieve the dimension and complexity of light comparable to dominant live action cinema. The claymation film's lighting appears soft and bright with no harsh shadows or severe angles. The tones and temperature of the light change as the scenes move from day to night and season to season with accompanying establishing shots of the boy's home and yard. The evocation of depth works similarly. By contrast, what we perceive as depth in hand drawn or computer generated animation derives not from artfully lit objects, but rather

artist generated two-dimensional images. Claymation exaggerates and manipulates depth, volume, and the scale of images but does work with the comparative physical proximity of three-dimensional forms. Van Blerk's *Velveteen Rabbit* creates a world entirely of clay with elaborate rooms and spaces full of the miscellaneous objects and details of everyday life. Clearly, animators commonly make claymation environments far smaller than they appear, but because they make the characters in the scene to scale with the settings, the people appear life sized.

Claymation techniques of both lighting and depth would suggest a closer approximation to live action illusions than drawn animation, and thus to a sense of perceptual realism, in Prince's terms. In claymation objects, at least at the moment of the image capture, incorporating the set's depth and lighting, existed in the world in which we live. According to Prince, when lighting approximates live action, it contributes to perceptual realism. We sense that the filmed objects we see, though not filmed "live," have existed in the three-dimensional world; such a sense of the filmed figures presences can make stop motion visually captivating, which may be a justification for some producers of its considerable expense and artistic challenges.

Alongside its capacity to engage viewers through a sense of perceptual and narrative realism, animation as a mode of representation—whatever the technique—relies on spectators' experience of the consistency of the immediate film unto itself and in context with other films. That is, spectators approach animation films just as they do live action cinema, from a context of familiarity with common narrative structures and particular filmic conventions such as camera framing and editing, as well as characterization. In the claymation *Velveteen*, for example, a close-up shot of the toy rabbit followed by a similarly framed shot of the toy horse in repeated sequence draws on spectator familiarity with the convention of shot-reverse-shot editing, which creates the impression that two characters are interacting with each other in physical proximity.

Because spectators see both figures speaking, viewers interpret the shot sequence as conversation between two characters. Just as this claymation, without attempting to duplicate the look of live action film, draws on that mode's conventions and effects, so too, can claymation evoke feelings and even a sense of realism among spectators comparable to those for live action cinema.

We readily see that the claymation film distinguishes the character of the velveteen rabbit in form and movement from the "real" rabbits in the garden: his shape differs from theirs and he cannot move in the same way. They have hind legs and can dance. Since all of the rabbits exist in the same illusory world of claymation, however, only the shape and movement of the velveteen rabbit signals the difference between real and toy. This representational distinction establishes a consistency within the film's diegesis that the real and those imagined to be real exist equally of clay. During one scene in which the claymation boy plays with his toys, they come to life in ways that seem impossibly "real" even within the film's established diegesis. That is, in this scene, the film creates no visual distinction between what the boy imagines and what exists in the "real" clay world: the train, horses and several other figures become exaggerated and detailed to the point of appearing and acting less like toys than like horses and trains one might see in the world of lived experience. For example, the boy's small top hat morphs into a well fitted cowboy hat as soon as the boy sits on his horse. The skin horse similarly becomes more realistic as his rocker disappears, and his now free hooves allow him to chase after the runaway toy train. The film effectively encodes these moments as the boy's imagination, come to life.

The directorial decision to depict the animating effects of a child's imagination may evoke viewer consciousness that the whole of the film's world is imaginary. Yet in the act of following the familiar narrative, the spectator likely interprets some facets of the world as more

imaginary than others. Alternatively, spectators may interpret some aspects of the story and its mise-en-scène as more real than even the toy train's becoming self-propelled. For example, the film depicts the boy's falling ill as a highly realistic event, clearly not emanating from the mind of this child. Of course, even as the film gives narrative and visual clues about what aspects of this illusory world are real, or imaginary, viewers know on some level that filmmakers molded all of characters and locations using standard claymation techniques. At the same time, spectators' recognition that the film's world is visually as well as narratively imaginary does not detract from appreciation of the fictional work's creation within its own terms of sincere emotional representations. While a spectator would not mistake the boy's room for a space that they could go live in, it consistently resembles the rest of the claymation environment in tone, color, and texture. The clay texture and primary colors of the boy's toys resemble the texture of the clay plants and yard. Those elements include the artful and differentiated, yet internally consistent use of texture, motion and lighting to which Prince calls our attention, but without any attempt at creating a perceptual realism comparable to that evoked by live action film. Indeed, the playful, expressive tone of the claymation *Velveteen Rabbit* very effectively generates its own sense of emotional and narrative realism.

Spectators accept an imaginary world depicted on film based on their previous exposure to a genre or style of filmmaking and the consistency of representational practices within the film itself as long as these filmic elements appeal to some component of the real world and perceptual realism as outlined by Prince. Even spectators accustomed only to color films can of course adjust to and come to enjoy black and white film, which they may even come to forget about. Animation's use of elements of lighting, motion, texture, and sound can approximate a sense of

the real, also in combination with live action footage, as long as the illusion remains internally consistent.

The mixed live action and animated 2009 version of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, directed by Michael Landon Jr., expands the familiar tale into an 88 minute feature-length film.<sup>82</sup> This version understandably differs markedly from the short book and from the differently animated short films I have discussed. To generate its additional length of almost an hour compared to those films, the feature creates a back-story for the boy, involves a father and grandmother much more extensively, and substantially elaborates the boy's adventures with his toy rabbit. This film spends much more time establishing narrative realism in the family's story than the shorts, which focus on the rabbit and his magical transformation in the end. The film includes both feature length narrative realism and the visual realism of live action scenes, which reinforce and emphasize the contrast between the parts of the narrative and the imaginary world of the rabbit.

From the outset, Landon's *Velveteen Rabbit* carefully establishes the live action sequences as the real world and the computer animated space as the boy's imaginary world. The film establishes the boy's relationship with his grandmother as the primary source of conflict; her stern nature and negativity are contrasted with the boy's playfulness. The film resolves the tension by having the grandmother slowly remember her own childhood which slowly softens her demeanor. When the boy contracts scarlet fever and the grandmother fears for his life, she and the boy's father reflect on the importance of cherishing the boy's childhood and their time together. Over the film's length, Landon juxtaposes live action sequences of the boy's life with his grandmother against his animated and imagined space in the toy filled attic, with the effect of

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<sup>82</sup> *The Velveteen Rabbit*, directed by Michael Landon Jr. (2009; Beverly Hills, CA: Believe Pictures/ Anchor Bay, 2009), DVD.

contrasting the real (as if real) and the constructed (as if imagining). This contrast of live action as a real space and animation as an imaginary one follows a long tradition in animation. From its earliest days, animators from Winsor McCay on have mixed live action with animation and experimented with animation's ability to present an animated figure as comparatively more playful than the physically bound live action actor. For example, the Fleisher Brothers' *Out of the Inkwell* series, initiated in 1919, used the drawn figure of Koko the Clown to express notions of what art and ink could become, while suggesting that the ideas and creativity arose from the artist creator we see in live action footage on screen. The 2009 version of *The Velveteen Rabbit* similarly divides its world into real and animated, whereby the animation represents the possibilities of the mind.

Mixing animation and live action enables this film to suggest that imagination comes from the mind of a child, but also exists independently of it. The transformation of the live-action toy figures into characters through both drawn and computer generated techniques initiates the imaginary space. This transformation first occurs when the boy initially meets the Velveteen Rabbit in the attic. First the toy rabbit slowly begins to glow and transform from photographed fabric to hand drawn animation, then the "live" boy also becomes an animated version of himself. A glowing line begins at the feet of each character as they slowly become incorporated into the animated versions of themselves. The surrounding world similarly becomes animated around them. The transformation clearly delineates the scene as rooted in imagination, obviously contrasted with the "real world." The feature film distinguishes much more thoroughly between the fabric rabbit that talks, moves, and loves, and the flesh and blood rabbits that appear later in the film, than did the short films' use of slight stylistic changes in drawing or movement to signal difference.



The film's imaginary world does display distinctions within itself: the animated characters are drawn, while the environment appears computer animated, a directorial decision to mix styles probably made for both aesthetic and practical reasons. The computer animated environment offers flexibility in shifting the "camera" and viewer perspective more readily and cheaply against a digital space than a drawn one, an advantage Landon's *The Velveteen Rabbit* displays extensively. While the scene begins with the boy in the attic with the toys, as he becomes more comfortable imagining the world around him, he transforms the imaginary space into more and more fantastic environments. The boy and the rabbit move from the attic to a giant tree house and then travel across green fields, lakes, and other open spaces. The characters frequently fly over these different computer generated landscapes and around the attic space in dynamic ways that would have proven extremely challenging and more time-consuming in traditional hand drawn work, since having a character move around a three-dimensional object in space would require redrawing the background object from each slightly different perspective. By contrast, computer animators can program a square in space and move the perspective around it without having to create a new square each time. This does not mean that the landscapes closely resemble live action landscapes. Computer animation allows for a great range of mimesis, and Landon, whether for aesthetics or cost, chose a look that appears more three-dimensional than much hand drawn animation, but which still does not entirely resemble live action. This style thus maintains the divide between the imaginary animated space and the narratively real live action space.

Unlike the landscapes, however, in the animated sequences the characters appear hand drawn. The effect emphasizes the distinction between the realistic live action and the obviously animated boy's imagined world. The stylistically unrealistic tradition of much of American hand

drawn animation conveys a familiar childlike look achieved by rounded edges, large eyes, and friendly, somewhat infantilized characterizations that many in the United States associate with children and fiction. This familiar form, which Disney much influenced, establishes certain expectations for how the animated characters will behave and seems engaging in a certain cute friendly way.

In representing a distinction between imagination and realism, the mixed live action and animated film also depicts the process of becoming encompassed by imagination in a way that metafilmically engages the spectators' relationship to the visualized space. Like the other versions, Landon's *Velveteen Rabbit* has a fantastic narrative, visually abstracted environments and characters, and a toy rabbit's perspective no spectator can directly relate to. However, the film needs only to contain kernels of truth or realism in consistent environments, feelings of childhood nostalgia, friendship and love for the spectators to accept the construction of the film and engage in the narrative. Just as the boy becomes visually integrated into the animated imagined space when spending time in the attic playing alone, the viewer can also become engaged by the filmic space enough to lose their sense of immediate space and time and become enveloped in this filmic world, but without somehow believing it is real in any sense.

The elements or impressions of realism that all the versions of *Velveteen Rabbit* I have discussed evoke are constructed to engage the spectator in the possibility of the worlds, however fictive. Film viewers—and particularly child viewers which all three films primarily target as audiences—arguably do not usually seek to emulate perceptual realism, particularly when viewing animation, but rather to engage vividly, in convincingly realistic ways in imaginary spaces. The drawn and computer generated animation in the feature length *The Velveteen Rabbit* visualizes the spectators' desire to partake of an imaginary space or world, as much as it shows the

Velveteen Rabbit's desire to become real. The film celebrates this imagined world as a special place for the boy; to emphasize the point, it even makes the grandmother seem harsh for her dismissal of it.

As a mode of representation, animation creates a different impression of the world than live action film, not only in the techniques of its construction, but also in the comparative visual and narrative distance from lived experience. Despite their important similarities in narrative and character development, even claymation animation does not approximate the capacity of live action film to evoke for spectators a sense of a profilmic event having occurred as in "real life." Most animation's readily evident constructedness makes obvious that the world of the film is not the world in which the viewer sits while watching. Indeed, for a variety of historical, aesthetic and technological reasons, animation rarely attempts to appear so close to live action that a spectator might mistake it for live action. Exceptions to animation's obvious constructedness have become more prevalent in recent years with the improvements in computer generated animation that make some computer animated work effectively indistinguishable from live action, but to sometimes the problematic effect of the uncanny valley, as mentioned in Chapter One. However, as I have argued, some elements of animation can approximate an impression or sense of the real. Besides the visual elements to which Prince points, we must again recall those that Neupert discusses: animation's ability to evoke emotional engagement with its characters, which can reinforce and bolster the feeling of realism in a film. If spectators needed close visual approximations of the world of experience to sense that characters are somehow real, then animation could not elicit character identification, as it clearly does. Young viewers crying at Bambi's loss of his mother provide evidence enough. Clearly, spectators do not need a closely literal or approximated visual reality to achieve a sense of emotional connection or even personal

identification with animated characters, whether in human, animal or object form—as the velveteen rabbit.

Within these visually unrealistic films, spectators may rely more heavily on narratively realistic elements for believability than perceptual elements. Some live action films of course create poorly realized characters, awkward editing, and narrative inconsistencies that repeatedly interrupt the realistic impression a spectator might expect, but even the most polished conventional live action films have limitations such as screen dimensionality, technology, and the absence of taste, touch, and smell. In those, as well as its essential photographic construction, a live action film can of course present only a mitigated sense of the real, even while viewers feel that they may be experiencing a real world.

Animators concoct, construct, manipulate, and create animated worlds to establish an aesthetic, aural, and narrative spectacle. It is in this world that the Velveteen Rabbit has been brought to life several times and in several ways. As this book has been animated and brought to life, spectators have been brought along with it. As viewers are bombarded with motion, images, and lighting, they are drawn into a self-contained world with its own rules and dimensions, and because it is so enjoyable spectators accept those rules. While no one would mistake the animated work in these films for live action, achieving a “live action” illusion is neither the goal of these animators, nor of many audiences of animation. Some computer generated animation does seek to achieve virtual mimesis with live action film and in certain circumstances succeeds. With animators capable of near mimesis, the prevalence of cartoonish looking computer animated characters speaks to many animators’ choice to create deliberately abstracted characters. As Prince discusses, in a few instances where animated characters like those in Robert Zemeckis’ *The Polar Express* (2004) appeared too much like live action without

appearing entirely convincing, the characters begin to seem uncanny. Hand drawn animation's perceptual abstraction avoids this uncomfortable feeling while still creating emotionally realistic characters and worlds.

Narrative and perceptual realism can be significant to spectators who can, however, easily disregard such "convincing" realism for the sometimes more immediate – and real – pleasures of the spectacle. Meeting the audience's expectations, maintaining a consistency of concept, and establishing emotionally realistic moods together work to create an impression of realism that is not about the reality of a lived world but about a realism in the world on screen. The varied impressions of realism created by those different *Velveteen Rabbit* films elicit the sympathy of the spectator and establish a narrative that feels real to the extent that spectators may find it engaging. That is, the realism in these films does not always come from the impression that these spaces or narratives happened in the world in which we live. Rather, the emotional evocation makes the worlds as real as necessary for viewers' engagement with characters they find sympathetic.

#### Evocations of Sympathy in Two Film Versions of *The Secret Garden*

Sympathy, an important element of character engagement, arises from the varied expression of realism in concert with narrative structure. The experience of engaging in and relating to a film comes from both the establishment of some form of realism and the successful engagement with characters on screen. As a vital part of this engagement with film, characters serve as a locus for spectators' emotions. The way that films inspire spectators to care is a complex process, about which many theorists have developed explanations. The narrative of *The*

*Secret Garden* offers a useful instance to explore the question, for the film thematizes specifically how the lead character, Mary, develops sympathy for other children. The themes and plot model engagement in the characters, just as the film constructs engagement for the spectators. The narrative also appears in both live action and animation versions. By examining the two works in close approximation, I can analyze theories of spectatorship that explain some elements of character engagement for both live action (the mode that most of these theories specifically address) and animation. By taking the live action version as a control for understanding character engagement, I can assess the possible value of theories like those developed Noël Carroll, Murray Smith, and Carl Plantinga to the analysis of animation.

First published in England in 1911, *The Secret Garden* is a children's *bildungsroman* that tells the story of a ten-year-old orphaned English girl, Mary Lennox, and her journey to find herself. When the novel begins, Mary's parents have just died from cholera in India. Having spent her entire life in India, Mary must now travel to England, to live with her uncle Archibald Craven, who initially proves emotionally distant. After beginning to interact with several servants and befriending a robin, Mary finds a once beloved garden that had been locked up and abandoned since the death of her uncle's wife. This garden becomes a safe haven for Mary and a secret which she shares only with her new friends including her cousin Colin, who she discovers living as an invalid in the mansion. Together they tend the garden with love and care as they evolve, develop, and nurture each other.

The novel *The Secret Garden* has a rich performance and cinematic history, for American and British filmmakers have adapted it to film, television, and the stage at least seven different times beginning as early as 1919. Foreign language translations of an American animated film and several foreign made adaptations of the original narrative appeared. For my analysis here of

representational theories of character engagement, I examine the 1993 Warner Brothers production directed by Agnieszka Holland and a 1994 animated adaptation made by the American Broadcasting Company directed by Dave Edwards.<sup>83</sup> The two films, one for theatrical release and one for television thus targeted slightly different audiences. Films made for television that target child audiences do not need to entice or include adults in their stylistic or narrative considerations. Since parents do not need to sit through the work, filmmakers do not need to make the film engaging for adults. However, theatrically released films, like Holland's *The Secret Garden* seek also to entertain the adults who take their young children to film theaters.

I chose these two films over such works as the 1949 release and the 1988 Hallmark version of *The Secret Garden*, because the early 1990s version of the tales have similarities that make their comparison both warranted and productive. Not only do the films draw upon the same source text, but their creators would also have had the same exposure to the story's previous cinematic and theatrical history. Both films similarly meet certain typical expectations of their respective modes while conveying similar moods and representations of Mary and her burgeoning friendships. The characters in both film versions of *The Secret Garden* establish elements and characteristics within the narrative to make engagement possible. Comparative analysis of the two reveals that the concepts of engagement and sympathy elaborated in recent works by cognitive film theorists do pertain equally to animation and live action film.

Of the different possible character components that elicit engagement, Murray Smith notes as significant *allegiance*, which he relates to the character's moral actions and attitudes.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *The Secret Garden*, directed by Dave Edwards (1994; Dallas, TX: NCircle Entertainment, 2007), DVD. (Animated).

<sup>84</sup> Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters*.

For example, spectators are more likely to feel engagement with characters that are good rather than evil. My analysis shows that live action and animated representations of characters' actions and moral choices function similarly. For example, in both the live action and the animated film versions of *The Secret Garden*, the main characters that spectators can engage with include Mary Lennox, Colin Craven, and to a smaller extent the maid Martha and her brother Dickon. While *The Secret Garden* does not primarily debate or highlight moral issues, it does focus on issues of friendship and emotional and social development. The book and films construct Dickon as an admirable figure, who functions as the moral paragon of the film. Dickon takes care of animals and communicates with them, albeit differently in the two films. He demonstrates wisdom enough to know how to help the garden grow, and he tries to improve the natural environment. Martha introduces Mary to Dickon and talks about him with great admiration for his treatment of and connection to animals. The films in both modes depict Dickon very favorably as a sincere moral character who is worth emulating. Spectators of both films can easily interpret Dickon's words and actions as moral and good. His knowledge of the moor and animals as well as his skill with them make him both morally admirable and enigmatic. Both are engaging qualities that serve to establish the audience's allegiance with Dickon. Murray asserts that this allegiance is key to creating the opportunity for engagement, and Dickon's demeanor and skills establish him as engaging.

Both versions of *The Secret Garden*, establish similar emotional scenarios as Mary's parents die at the onset of both films. In the live action version directed by Agnieszka Holland, Mary's parents die during an earthquake, which neither matches the other film versions of *The Secret Garden* nor the book, but it does allow for a moment of visual tremor and trauma for the audience, without attempting to represent the possibly more gruesome physical effects of a



cholera epidemic.<sup>85</sup> The book and the animated film sidestep the possible distasteful visceral depiction of an epidemic by beginning the film showing the almost empty house in India. Only Mary, voiced by Anndi McAfee in the animated film, remains to inhabit the now lonely space before two soldiers discover her. Despite the differences in the cause of her parents' death, both films establish Mary as a pitiable orphaned child.

The death of the protagonist's parents serves as what Plantinga refers to as a paradigm scenario. Orphans appear in many narratives as a long standing tradition in myths, fairy tales and literature. An absence of parents can quickly establish loss and vulnerability in the world. Plantinga argues for paradigm scenarios as powerful tools of engagement which operate as points of reference that humanize and familiarize characters. Both the live action and the animation film establish the paradigm of the orphan, as they can equally communicate the death of Mary's parents. Spectators of both films are thus invited to pity Mary as both modes can similarly communicate the narrative.

Similarly, the actions of Mary's Uncle Archibald, who willfully neglects and frequently abandons Colin to the care of servants, generate suffering and childhood angst that engages the spectator's sympathy. In both film versions and the book, Archibald leaves Colin and the manor for long periods of time and often ignores him when at home. With Colin's mother dead, Mrs. Medlock and the other servants serve as primary caretakers for the unfortunate boy. Even the representations of his bedroom, in their dimly lit austere grandeur, do not seem to imply care but rather storage of the wealthy child. While many people, especially among the child audiences, have not experienced the death of a parent, everyone has felt loss or sadness when ignored by a

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<sup>85</sup> *The Secret Garden*, directed by Agnieszka Holland (1993; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1993), DVD. (Live Action).

loved one. Either due to parents going to work, spending time with another sibling, or through instances of more serious neglect, nearly anyone can perceive the strain of this child's mistreatment. The familiar feeling of not receiving enough attention from a parent in Colin's life resembles moments in viewers lives creating a connection through the paradigm scenario, like those which Plantinga describes.

The animated version of *The Secret Garden* begins by showing the title card followed by a bright yellow sun. This shot then mimics a pan across an Indian port city. Typically 'exotic' sitar music serves to evoke India to an American audience. The film then shows two soldiers discussing cholera and how it killed Mary Lennox's parents. When discussing the Lennox place, one soldier asks "Nobody's left then?" and in response his companion answers "I don't think so. Just have to close up the place now." The people who have cared for Mary have forgotten her or died, leaving her nearly to starve in the large house.

In the first moments that the audience and the soldiers see Mary Lennox, she complains about how her nanny abandoned her. She angrily breaks a framed picture of her parents and shouts, "Why do they always leave me alone?" The soldiers explain the situation to Mary, but she does not scream or wail at the news. If Mary feels any sympathy for her parents here, the spectator cannot see it. This lack of visible sympathy establishes Mary's need to change. Despite Mary's initial inability to feel for another person, the narrative invites the spectators to feel for her. The film does this through the soldier's friendly sympathetic demeanor and the familiar situation of an orphaned child. This common situation or paradigm scenario creates an immediately understandable circumstance that is quickly understood and easily sympathized with.

Even if Mary's attitude seems surly or rude, her situation as an orphan elicits sympathy. The sympathy of her situation is heightened by the voiceover lamenting, "If only I could have known that in a few moments, I would lose them forever." The live action character herself, like her animated counterpart, appears disruptive and angry. Although her behavior may not inspire sympathy, her voiceover conveying her awareness of loss and the depiction of her life after her parents' death does invite such a response. In terms of Murray Smith's analysis of the structure of sympathy, Mary is at this moment a recognizable character, but the story has only begun to focus on her story, which sets up the alignment through her experience. At the beginning of the live action version, the voiceover creates allegiance as well as provides a connection to a person who, even if she does not show clear grief at the moment, will prove to value her childhood in retrospect.

The film's realization of the paradigm scenario of the orphaned lead character thus works to evoke sympathy. As Plantinga argues, the scenario's familiar tropes provide a recognizable situation which allows the spectators easy access to the narrative's emotional patterns and establishes spectator expectations. The film demonstrates Mary's situation of loss more fully in the next scene as she and the other orphans of the Indian earthquake arrive on a dock and wait for relatives to claim them. The other children mockingly sing to her "Mary Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow," making her appear alone even in the company of other children. On this dark rainy pier, she stands alone, and as an official calls her by a number rather than her name, she appears very pitiable. Other versions of this film, for example the 1949 film directed by Fred Wilcox, depicts Mary differently.<sup>86</sup> Mary, as performed by Margaret O'Brien,

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<sup>86</sup> *The Secret Garden*, directed by Fred M. Wilcox (1949; Culver City, CA: MGM/UA Home Video, 1991), VHS.

behaves much more aggressively in her tantrums and becomes a very possibly more engaging character than the Mary in the 1990s version. In her willingness to loudly express her frustration by shouting and by breaking furniture, she becomes an engaging figure to which some children who feel similar frustrations may relate; according to Smith's theory this feeling may create allegiance.

Neither film initially establishes the arrogant angry Mary as a very likeable character, but rather one whom spectators pity. As Plantinga argues, paradigm scenarios can enable the situation in *The Secret Garden* creates engagement through establishing alignment or a recognizable familiar relationship that others can relate to. We feel for her because she is alone, rather than seeing her as feeling lonely. The animated version, while not visually realistic, establishes a plot and situations as obviously represented by the visually flat characters as the live action. The live action and animated films clearly create the plot and situations in similar ways, and almost identically structure the potential engagement that Mary's circumstances invite.<sup>87</sup>

In his own analysis of allegiance, Murray Smith argues that music helps establish both external and internal elements of a character and thus supports feelings of allegiance. The music frequently swells in films as characters fall in love or quickens with their fears. In Holland's live action film, soft orchestral music recurs at key points in the narrative. The music varies from sitar music signaling India in the beginning to an assortment of strings, piano, and wind instruments that we hear through the section of the film depicting Mary's stay at Wisselthwaite Manor. The music generally expresses the mood or tone of each scene as well as Mary's own moods. Smith argues that in films, "...the score is imbricated with specified, emotional states

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<sup>87</sup> Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*.80-102.

experienced by characters.”<sup>88</sup> In the scene of Mary’s arrival in England, a haunting clarinet played extradiegetically is followed by the hollow airy whistle of a ship’s horn. Amongst the sound of the other children getting off the boat and the pier’s bustle, the clarinet’s mimicking of the hollow whistle sounds lonely and isolating. The sounds seem as if they are representative of Mary’s isolation even amongst other orphaned children shipped back from India. Her isolation encourages spectators to align with Mary through the plot and narrative.

The animated film takes a slightly different approach, in devoting a longer time to Mary’s passage. The sound here consists of an extradiegetic song that serves as a musical voiceover. While not emanating from Mary directly, the lyrics ask for a home and a place to live and clearly express her character’s desires. However, the song heard in the film is not nearly as lonely or solemn as the live action version of the film. In another example, the use of the song extends the pattern of main characters in animated and live action musicals. Cinderella, Belle, Ariel, and numerous other animated characters launch into songs which both identify a major conflict in the film and mark them as lead characters. The lonely but hopeful tune wistfully presents Mary’s emotional state, while the film’s visuals transport her from India to England. The piano accompaniment provides sentimental background to Mary’s pleas for a home. As in the live action film, another sound interrupts the music, but here it is made by a train rather than the ship’s whistle. In both works, these lonely sounds propel the narrative from one element of the journey to another. Both film versions use music to reinforce the character’s struggle after the loss of her parents and the sadness of her solitary travels. While the moods feel slightly different, the impact on character engagement operates through the same processes and to the same end of creating sympathy.

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<sup>88</sup> Smith, *Engaging Characters*, 12.

Noël Carroll and Plantinga both situate their analysis of engagement as distinctive from the notion of identification. In contrast, Berys Gaut relates the term to how spectators imagine themselves in the situation of the characters on screen. Identification defined as a viewer imagining him or herself as the character, even if the spectator does not believe themselves to *be* the character, identification may be a less useful model for understanding animation than Plantinga or Carroll's understanding of engagement. Animation's not showing a perceptually realistic place in the world informs my experience of imagining myself in the situation of a character. Gaut's argument for the use of the term identification seems to limit the likelihood of animated identification, yet his own example indicates otherwise. Gaut does suggest that his paradigm could function for animation, since he mentions Lara Croft from the 1996 video game *Lara Croft Tomb Raider* as an example of a character with whom video game players might identify.<sup>89</sup> Without providing a rationale for this example, Gaut's use of Lara Croft reveals an assumption that his theory would pertain to animated works.

Murray Smith argues as a part of the larger schema of engagement, which posits that to recognize and ultimately engage with characters that spectators need exposure to the visual continuity and coherence of that character. Murray Smith defines recognition as establishing "the spectator's construction of the character: The perception of a set of textual elements, in film typically cohering around the image of a body, as an individuated and continuous human agent."<sup>90</sup> For characters to function they must consist of more than an "inert bundle of traits."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*. 280.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Engaging Characters*, 82.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

Rather, “[we] perceive and conceive of characters as integral, discrete textual constructs.”<sup>92</sup>

While Smith positions such a character as “human,” his description of a singular “discrete” figure can in fact function for both live action humans and animals as well as animated figures, as long as those animated figures maintain a consistency of appearance and identifiable features.

Smith’s use of the term human when describing characters may initially appear to exclude such characters as the robin in the animated or live action *Secret Garden*. However, Smith clarifies that his term refers to the typical manifestation of characters, but could include other types. The robin in both versions of the story, for example, does exist as an integral and discreet figure that appears consistent and coherent. The animated robin even speaks with a single human voice throughout the film. The animated Mary and her fellow characters, both human and animal, appear visually consistent throughout, maintaining the same shapes, colors, and generally voices so that spectators can easily recognize them. Viewers would not fail to identify the animated Mary throughout the film, for she changes only slightly in coloring, indicating her improved health at Wisselthwaite Manor. That change to a healthier looking complexion also appears in the live action version through the character’s makeup.

Besides establishing recognizable characters, visual representations also initiate *affective mimicry*, according to Smith, or a similar effect that Plantinga calls *emotional contagion*.<sup>93</sup>

Affective mimicry, a factor in Smith’s understanding of the sympathetic relation that spectators have to characters describes as a psychological reaction. A facial expression that occurs when a

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>93</sup> Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 239. and Smith, *Engaging Characters*, 82.

person encounters certain emotional stimuli would be, for Smith, an example of effective mimicry. Smith argues that people are naturally sympathetic and commonly respond in kind to the emotions of those around us. Accounting for a similar emotional response by viewers, Plantinga's preferred term "emotional contagion" describes situations when a viewer witnesses another's emotion and physically mimics that expression of feeling. For example, someone may smile in response to seeing a child smile. Plantinga argues that this physical reaction can trigger a corresponding emotional response. Not only does one smile in response, but one may also feel happier as well.

Unlike live action, animation may not elicit this same kind of emotional mimicry or contagion because the faces of animated characters are typically more abstract and may not viscerally evoke a living person. The perhaps most dissimilar elements between live action and animated film include the aesthetic difference between an animated figure and a live action actor representing a character. No actor visually performs the emotional encounters of animated characters. Rotoscoping is perhaps one exception to animated characters having no connection to actors' visual performance, like more recently developed technologies involving computer generated images. The practice of rotoscoping complicates the definition of animation as contrasted to live action film.

In the live action version of *The Secret Garden*, Mary's expression shows awe when she first finds the hidden garden which has been locked away for ten years. Initially the shots of Mary show her through the brush and branches of the garden. Overgrown foliage obscures her until she pushes slowly through it, revealing more of herself. Mary's reactions to the mysterious gray garden include some of the character's first smiles. The corners of her mouth turn up slightly as she looks at the garden, touches the face of a sculpture, and wanders around the large



space. The close-up reaction shots in juxtaposition with the wider shots of the gray winter garden show Mary's joy at finding this uncultivated, secret space. Her expressions communicate her emotional reactions while also evoking feelings of wonderment and affection. In other circumstances such a weedy gray garden could evoke a character's fear, anxiety or boredom.

The animated Mary offers no visual contrast or depth, nor a filmed human actor. Thus the film makes no causal connection between a particular person in the three dimensional world and the drawn representation of a girl looking around a garden. However, the very construction of the drawn version of Mary evokes these same elements of expression and human visage. The "camera" shows Mary's complexion in only two flat shades of an approximately Caucasian flesh tone with little to no modeling. She and the other characters appear visually quite flat, their facial features are black lines on the flat color. Mary's eyes, nose, mouth, and body are clearly indicated, however, unmistakably representing those features of a live girl. Mary's eyes widen, her mouth opens, and her jaw drops as she exclaims, "A garden, a secret garden. How still it is." Her head moves forward in apparent excitement and then back with a hint of fright as she raises her hand to cover her mouth as it forms a soft "o." Similar to her live action counterpart, the expression of the animated Mary, in conjunction with her voice, communicates awe and joy at the mysterious place she has found. Spectators can generally understand expressions, including drawn represented expressions, as conveying emotional significance. At other points in the film, Mary frowns, smiles, and similarly demonstrates emotions that mimic human expression significantly enough to convey meaning to spectators.

Mary's situation, expression, and distinct personality appear in both versions of *The Secret Garden*. These elements collectively provide evidence that, based on the understanding by Carroll, Gaut, and Smith of engaging characters, spectators may find Mary equally engaging in

either animation or live action. As these theorists assert, these opportunities to engage do not necessitate but provide the possibility for engagement.

Both modes of *The Secret Garden* on screen demonstrate methods of engagement, even while addressing somewhat different audiences. As the director of the animated version, Dave Edwards, would have known that the animated film had no planned theatrical release, he would have likely aimed for the pacing and tone for a different audience than did the live action version. Even in the DVD of this made-for-television film, one can perceive pauses that might have previously included a commercial break. Children in homes with other channels available and the numerous distractions in the domestic space might have changed the channel away from a slowly paced film. The rather quick pacing makes the made-for-television film seem episodic in its styling and narrative organization. Similarly the bright simplified images and storyline would also function well for a possibly distracted young audience. This version simplifies the characters and elaborates the drama around the caretakers' intentions. In the live action version, Mrs. Medlock, played by Maggie Smith, believes wrongly that providing Colin with sunshine and fresh air may injure him. By contrast, in this animated version of *The Secret Garden*, Mrs. Medlock and the doctor deliberately try to keep Colin sick due to their own financial interest. They scheme to keep him on more medication than necessary in hopes of maintaining control over the manor house. This oversimplification of the 'evil' characters and their motives probably arises from the film's Saturday morning scheduling. These directorial choices speak to an emphasis on the young target audience to establish engagement, although some of the changes could easily appear in either live action or animation.

Similarly, the animals in the animated version literally speak English. A cat, which does not appear in other version of the film, and the robin both talk and understand spoken language.

A song in the film explains that “If you listen to the bullfrog croak or the squirrel or the gull or the lamb, all the mysteries of nature are clearly heard,” thereby suggesting that if a person just pays enough attention to the animals they can speak the same language. The cat and bird then communicate in full English sentences effectively enough to plan a way to thwart Mrs.

Medlock’s the evil plans. The robin also explicitly tells Mary the location of the key so that Mary may enter the garden. The magic of talking animals occurs frequently in animation and would probably seem familiar to children watching Saturday morning television. In contrast, the live action film makes the robin’s friendship and help in finding the key much less magical but simply special and coincidental. The live action version clearly targets a theatrical audience which would include adults, which might encourage more narrative realism.

The 1993 live action film attempts to approximate the world in which we live in some ways by staying true to the book. While seemingly magical, the secret garden itself in both the book and this film version has no supernatural elements. The robin shows Mary where the key to the garden is coincidentally, while the animated robin specifically responds to a request to help find it. The occurrence of supernatural elements is however not limited to animation, not even in film adaptations of *The Secret Garden*. The 1949 version of *The Secret Garden* presents an almost *noir* style work including a crow rather than a robin, and a much greater emphasis on the frightening nature of the large manor house and its secrets. The film makes several allusions to magic, ghosts, and mystery, deliberately emphasizing these more frightening or dangerous elements of the story. Mary’s angry fit in response to Colin’s behavior also appears notably more violent as she throws objects around the room, in distinction from Mary’s yelling in the other films. This older version of the story appeals to darker elements in the narrative with the effect of increasing the drama of the work, in stark contrast to both of the 1990s versions which similarly

portray more sentimentalized narratives. Again, these changes in the versions of the film demonstrate the influence of the director, time of the film's production, target audience, and expectations from audiences about animation and live action film, while yet allowing engagement in characters across modes.

### Limitations of Cognitive Film Theory for Animation

In examining sympathy and realism in animation, theorists working from approaches grounded in cognitive psychology have in the last twenty years extensively analyzed film's capacity to create compelling characters who impact spectators' emotions. By exploring films through the lens of these current psychological concepts and by analyzing character engagement in particular, theorists like Murray Smith, Noël Carroll, and Carl Plantinga have established a strong contemporary foundation for understanding films and spectators. They have also specifically addressed issues relating to the impact of visual representation on spectators' acceptance of the images on screen, and have broken down character qualities which establish engagement. When these theories, which historically have primarily addressed live action, are brought to bear on animation, the approaches seem to hold up across modes. The theories focus on narrative situations, recognizable characters, and general comprehension of the emotion that the characters express, it becomes clear that both animation and live action can create engaging and in important ways, realistic films.

However, despite how well suited cognitive theories have proven to such analysis, they cannot account for other aspects of spectator relations to a film. The universalized approach of cognitive theories does not address the significance of race or gender to engagement and

identification. With the impression of film realism serving to elicit emotional connection and sympathy which ultimately encourages engagement; films both animated and live action have impact on spectators.

These different modes of the same narrative illustrate methods and approaches of realizing the narrative for different audiences and expectations. While the live action *Secret Garden* and mixed version of *The Velveteen Rabbit* aim to include broad audiences, the entirely animated versions try much more specifically to appeal to children. Scholars who have to date theorized engagement from cognitivist perspectives have largely ignored more specific spectator expectations and personal levels of identification. However, it is important to bridge this gap between presumptions of universalized spectators and culturally informed understandings of different spectators. Cognitive theories of how films construct narrative, paradigm scenarios, and moral allegiance should be examined based on cultural and social categories like race, class, gender, and age. Many films cognitivists discuss are addressed to children, and yet film theorists who address engagement have not discussed variables which might alter children's engagement with film. Similarly, while the paradigm scenarios established regarding a white British aristocratic orphan girl may speak to some audiences, they may as easily alienate many others.

Despite not offering a visual approximation to the world in which we live, animation functions in remarkably similar ways to live action film in its ability to evoke and convince spectators to care about the characters on screen. Richard Dyer argues that films communicate emotional utopias that respond to cultural and social absences and negativity in lived experience.<sup>94</sup> Live action film, Dyer argues, can construct a space which generates a utopian feeling by depicting occurrences and impressions of abundance, energy, intensity, transparency,

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<sup>94</sup> Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," *Movie*, no. 24 (Spring 1977): 2-13.

and community. Importantly, Dyer argues that such feelings function in films to supplant the viewers' awareness of societal deficiencies: scarcity, exhaustion, dreariness, manipulation, and fragmentation. His arguments grounded in socio–historical context can account for the impact of issues of class, race, and gender in the media. All versions of *The Velveteen Rabbit* and *The Secret Garden*, despite their aesthetic differences, convey characters who through strife or struggle find joy and friendship. Their utopian worlds show bright places that, while occasionally frightening, ultimately embrace viewers resolve in happy predictable endings. While spectators may not mistake the animated versions for the world in which we live, they do experience the feelings conveyed by the characters. In creating such emotional spaces, films, whether animated or not provide opportunities for spectators to engage in a utopian world.

Chapter Three:  
Distinguishing Gendered and Raced Characters:  
How Psychoanalytic and Culture Studies Theories of Spectatorship  
Pertain “Differently” to Animation

The parallel analyses in Chapter Two of live action and animated versions of two relatively simple children’s tales enabled me to isolate issues of cinematic realization of realism and sympathy. There I demonstrated how cognitive film theoretical approaches could account for animated film’s capacity to evoke a sense of filmic realism comparably compelling within its own diegetic terms as well as generate character sympathy in the same ways as live action film. However, assessing the relevance of multiple theories of cinematic spectatorship of animation requires a broader selection of films as case studies. The films discussed in Chapter Two do not adequately illustrate the workings of psychoanalytic and other theories which focus on spectator comprehension of the psychic, cultural, and ideological impact of cinema.

In this chapter, I turn to analyzing several paradigms that constitute some significant theoretical approaches to spectatorship, notably psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches. Probing the theories’ relevance to feature-length film animation can, I argue, suggestively extend their well-established power and nuance as explanatory models. Film theories taking psychoanalytic approaches emphasize the significance of gender in identity formation as the dominant locus for identification in cinema. Yet in animation the information provided to spectators indicating gender and race often become exaggerated and caricatured for comic effect, while at other times the rendering of characters camouflages and conceals or alters conventionally communicated social aspects of human identity like gender and ethnicity.

Cultural studies theories of reception more specifically address how meaning arises in the spectators' "negotiations" with the text, allowing for an array of interpretations based on spectators' perspectives and knowledge horizons. Particularly queer theories that have emerged in the field of cultural studies challenge aspects of heteronormative representations and expectations in cinema viewing. Queer approaches are, I argue, an important approach in analyzing animation spectatorship.

Analyses of race and often gender orientation in cinema frequently focus on issues of screen representation, rather than specific modes and effects of spectatorship. Yet the concepts of viewing practices that often underpin such studies entail theories of spectatorship. Cultural and psychoanalytic theories have long worked parallel to each other in that they similarly examine spectators' internalization of films' meanings and the workings of ideology in cinema. By placing the approaches in this chapter in concert, I can integrate the two strands of theoretical approaches into a single analysis and create an expansive understanding of film spectatorship. Thereby I address the cinematic spectator as a figure who is at once subject to social and cultural influences and also capable of negotiating meaning in the individuated experience of a film text.

I assess psychoanalytic and cultural studies theories of cinema spectatorship against the workings of two feature films that in different ways mix live action and animation into a single integrated narrative. Such a selection enables me to consider the workings of animation not in isolation but in direct relation to live action in films that create characters across both modes. I examine the relevance of key aspects of psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches for two case study films: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (Robert Zemeckis, 1988) and *The Reluctant Dragon* (Alfred L. Werker and Hamilton Luske, 1941). I have chosen to discuss these mixed animation and live action features for several reasons. As films produced by Walt Disney Pictures (the



former under the Touchstone label), these works have a particular cultural significance because of that studio's dominance of the American animation feature film market from the early twentieth century on and consequently of the producer's long-standing cultural impact. Both films include separate sections of entirely animated and entirely live action sequences, immediately juxtaposed in the narrative through editing. However, of particular interest in considering how spectators might engage in and make sense of animated films, both films include animated characters within live action backgrounds and live action characters interacting with animated ones. Perhaps most intriguingly, both show live action and animated characters interacting in ways intrinsic to the narrative of each film.

Such mixed mode features offer a complex test case of spectatorship of live action and animation in combination or close succession. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *The Reluctant Dragon* each distinctly realize a mix of animated and live action characters. In juxtaposing the two modes of production, each of these films establishes a focused site of contrasts for spectators to perceive and construct meaning from the characters and other aspects of the film appearing across the different registers. Choosing films which demonstrate both live action and animation eliminates many other features of film production which might account for differences in live action and animated characters. Looking at this contrast in a single work thus provides a kind of live action control with which to compare the undertheorized animated characters. As a point of departure for the analysis, we must first consider how characters arise differently through animation.

Live action film captures images of the profilmic world and in that way has a photographically indexical—seemingly direct—connection to the human body in a way that animation does not. All animated bodies of characters on screen, whether hand-drawn or

computer manipulated, derive predominantly from a source than cannot be filmed: the imagination and interpretation of one or more artists. Such a generative process complicates the ways that the resultant images bear marks of an array of social values, but particularly, I will argue in this chapter, especially the ways that animation encodes gender and race. Animation also allows for characters that do not visibly demonstrate what we would consider usual or common human indicators of gender or race.

For example, the crows in Disney's 1941 feature *Dumbo* do not have human skin color, a trait that in American society commonly gets interpreted in racialized terms, yet the crows have been perceived as "raced" in the film, through their accents, language, voice casting, mannerisms, and costuming.<sup>95</sup> But I would argue that the lead character, the elephant Dumbo, and indeed, all animated characters are "raced" in that they inevitably bear traits that are widely correlated to specific social constructions of human "races" within the time and culture of their production and circulation. In the same way that the crows' mannerisms and clothing suggest race, Dumbo's persona similarly marks him as white.

Similarly, although such drawn animated characters are obviously not biologically "sexed," nor do they always display secondary sex traits associated with human bodies (breasts, facial hair, etc.), the animated figures are nonetheless "gendered," visually as well as aurally, within the context of the narrative. In fact, given that the artistically mediated figures bear

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<sup>95</sup> Jacqueline Maloney, interviewed in *Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood & Corporate Power*, directed by Miguel Picker and Chyng Feng Sun (2001; San Diego, CA: Art Media Production, 2001), DVD. Maloney discusses the crows in *Dumbo* as one of many examples of Disney characters that represent African Americans through particular styles of dance and speech.

generally exaggerated animated characteristics of (human–correlated) gender and race, those particular racial and gender indicators arguably can affect spectators perhaps less consciously but all the more profoundly than obviously raced and gendered live action characters. Both *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *The Reluctant Dragon* present cinematic moments that in some ways conform to well theorized understandings of how films may structure or be implicated in spectatorship. However, the films show markers of gender and race in ways that do not clearly reveal the same kinds of visible or human markers as live action characters. Further, these mixed mode films suggest a plethora of culturally significant spectatorial issues in their plots, which depict relationships among a variety of characters, sometimes involving violence.

One such issue is the animation of drawn human bodies. The bodies of animated human characters may arguably amplify significant representational–spectatorial concerns such as the objectification of Jessica Rabbit, a primary character in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, as a highly sexualized female body with unrealistic proportions. In addition, the film’s indicators of African American cultural traits in animated non–human forms arguably make the characters seem “subhuman.”<sup>96</sup> Such contestations may have deterred the Disney Company from animating a black human man until 2009, more than 75 years after the company’s founding. Between the centaurette in *Fantasia* (1940) and human characters in the *Hercules* (1997), Disney had not attempted to present a black human—or even a half human—woman in a feature film. Even more remarkable before *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), Disney had never animated a black

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 78; Jason Sperb, “‘Take a Frown, Turn It Upside Down’: Splash Mountain, Walt Disney World, and the Cultural De-rac[e]-ination of Disney’s *Song of the South* (1946),” *Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 5 (August 2005): 933.

male human in a feature film.<sup>97</sup> Given the frequent exaggeration in Disney's animated characters, to depict an African American would have likely resulted in images that would resemble historically racist and mocking caricatures. Some critics argue, for example, that "toons" in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* represent African American characters. The term "toons" functions as a shortened version of the word cartoons in this world (and yet arguably evokes the old derogatory term "coons," as a shortened form of "raccoons"). Certainly "toons" comes across as a somewhat derogatory term when spoken by some of the live action characters.

Animation also exemplifies the separation of sexuality and gender, for of course animated characters bear no embodied biological sex characteristics, in contrast to the physically sexed bodies of live actors. For example, in a film like Robert Zemeckis' 1984 film *Romancing the Stone*, the filmed images maintain an indexical photographic relation to the body of actress Kathleen Turner at the age she was when the film was made. By contrast, even though Turner voiced Jessica Rabbit in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, that character's body could have looked like anything or anyone according to the inclinations or style of the artists, within the terms of the film's overarching genre and emphases. Below I discuss the specific implications of Jessica Rabbit's body, but would here in the introduction to my case analyses make only a general point: most spectators of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* doubtless bring to the experience a sense of both live action film and animation's established practices of constructing gender and race and also a sense of how those two modes—live action film and animation—may represent bodies differently and thereby also signify embodiment and its attendant issues in ways that require different kinds of theorization of spectator address. I focus initially on aspects of gender difference along the conventional male–female axis of contrast, for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 94.

positions viewers to respond to it. I then consider aspects of racial encoding in *Rabbit* from largely cultural studies perspectives, and turn to the structuring of spectatorship in relation to gender (female and “queer”) across different scenes in *The Reluctant Dragon*.

Psychoanalytic film theory has focused extensively on how narrative emphases and techniques of cinematography and editing may help structure a spectator’s point of view in relation to a film’s characters or the story’s unfolding, a process of engaging the viewer in film that is sometimes referred to suture. Such an approach has fostered and enabled critical analysis of the specific live action representations particularly of women on screen, as well as the ways especially a Classical Hollywood narrative and characters may invite subject identification and objectification in accordance with conventionally understood gender difference. However, psychoanalytic film theories have not to date effectively addressed other aspects of film spectatorship, such as how a given viewer’s understanding of his or her particular social positioning, including that partially shaped by racial difference, might structure the spectatorial experience or even understanding of depicted film characters.

By contrast, cultural studies approaches have worked to directly incorporate aspects of spectators’ self-perceived identities, including her or his race or ethnicity, into consideration of how films generate meanings through reception among demographically and politically diverse audiences. Thus I aim here to integrate psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches into my test analysis of the two mixed medium films, to demonstrate the value of combining the theories to achieve a thoroughgoing understanding of spectatorship. A clear conclusion I reach is that such a combination of theories functions well to explicate different aspects of live action film. The chapter demonstrates in some detail that psychoanalytic film theories and/or cultural studies approaches productively bear out in analysis of how animated imagery and characters structure

gendered and racially marked spectatorship, yet there are areas of analysis that could use elaboration to more fully explain the flexibility and abstraction of animation.

*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, and *The Reluctant Dragon* both evoke issues of gender, sexuality, and race for spectators across the modes of animation and live action. In *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, the animated Jessica Rabbit performs at a nightclub for a live action audience that ogles at her provocative performance. In *The Reluctant Dragon*, the humorist writer Robert Benchley, while playing himself in the film, watches as animators at Disney Studios create several animated shorts that he views. *The Reluctant Dragon* contextualizes the framed animated shorts by representing them as spectacles within the narratives and by showing diegetic spectators of the animated sequences. Thus in *The Reluctant Dragon* the animated sequences appear as literal screenings of animated cartoons being made or newly finished. Such scenes as noted in each film makes visible the role of spectator *within* the diegetic space of these texts, which in turn offers another layer of identification for the feature film audience. I will demonstrate below that *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *The Reluctant Dragon* both show white male audiences in their diegeses that arguably position the films' audiences as white male and demonstrate their perspectives as embodied in these characters, ultimately shaping spectators' experience of the films' gendered and racial projections through exaggerated bodies.

#### Theories of Gendered and Raced Spectatorship in Relation to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*

The mixed mode film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (henceforth *Rabbit*) broke new ground in 1988 in the degree of integration and technologies demonstrated in the work, perhaps in ways that also Disney's *Song of the South* (1946) represented a technological "break through," even as

many audiences at the time of its release found *Song of the South* politically and socially very retrograde.<sup>98</sup> *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* contains extended segments in which animated characters interact apparently physically with live action characters. The film's achievement of polished integrated movement and lighting advanced the expectations and possibilities available for mixed mode films. Narratively, the film parodies the characters and storyline, if not the tone or cinematography, of a classic 1940s *film noir*. Theoretical analysis of *film noir* such as those by Richard Dyer and E. Ann Kaplan have quite extensively revealed the deep-seated structuring of gender and race and multiple marks of "otherness" in that style or cycle of cinema productions. Indeed, perhaps due to the intriguing ambiguities in many *noir* characters, like the *femme fatale*, the hard-boiled detective, the fey criminal and other frequently "queer" characters populating the social fringes depicted in these films (and the novels on which they were based, e.g., *Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep*, *Laura*), those works have provided highly productive case studies for demonstrating the yield of psychoanalytic, queer, and cultural studies theoretical approaches to live action film.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Robert Zemeckis, "Behind the Ears: The True Story of Roger Rabbit," in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Hollywood California: Touchstone Pictures, 2003, DVD. ;Jason Sperb, "'Take a Frown, Turn It Upside Down': Splash Mountain, Walt Disney World, and the Cultural De-rac[e]-ination of Disney's *Song of the South* (1946)," *Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 5 (August 2005): 933.

<sup>99</sup> In *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), Mary Astor plays a classic *femme fatale* as she asks Humphrey Bogart's character for help and tempts him to become involved in her problems. Her interaction with a private eye is perhaps the closest to Jessica Rabbit's situation as she solicits the detective to help her in a dangerous situation. In *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks,

*Rabbit* tells the story of a drunken private eye in a fictionalized 1940s Hollywood. Eddie Valiant, played by Bob Hoskins, is hired by local movie producer R. K. Maroon to watch and record the movements of the cartoon wife of Maroon's cartoon star, Roger Rabbit. After Valiant catches Roger's wife, Jessica Rabbit, playing the child's game "patty cake" with a live action human man, Marvin Acme, the police find Acme dead. As the police's primary suspect, Roger Rabbit, comes to Valiant for help. Valiant investigates the death, hides Roger from the police, and ultimately returns the situation to rights. The film is set in a fantasy version of Hollywood which is adjacent to the animated community of Toontown. The period film is narratively set during the rise of the subgenre of detective films considered *noir* and also during animation's so called Golden Age.<sup>100</sup> The film's technically innovative production employed

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1946), Lauren Bacall plays the part of Vivian Rutledge who similarly portrays the *femme fatale*, much like Laura Hunt in the film *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944). Both Bacall's and Hunt's characters lead the male protagonists to potentially deadly circumstances. As noted in the first chapter, Dyer describes the *femme fatale* in his article "Resistance Through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*," in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: The British Film Institute, 1978), 115-122. In another article, Jason Sperb, "'Take a Frown, Turn It Upside Down': Splash Mountain, Walt Disney World, and the Cultural De-rac[e]-ination of Disney's *Song of the South* (1946)," *Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 5 (August 2005): 933., on *film noir*, Dyer analyzes how women characters represent a dangerous threat in *films noirs*. "Homosexuality and Film Noir." *Jump Cut*, no. 16 (1977): 18-21.

<sup>100</sup> The term refers to a historic period in animation generally between the 1930s and 1950s when animation shorts were popularly played in theaters between feature length films. Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, Donald Duck, Betty Boop and many now famous characters emerged from the hands



hand drawn cel animation, puppetry, and numerous special effects techniques to integrate cartoon characters throughout the film, as if cartoon characters inhabited the live action world and live action characters could similarly enter the cartoon world of Toontown.

The live action hardboiled detective Valiant plays the film's active male protagonist, who stands as the primary figure for audience identification as a (typically *noir*) flawed and lonely hero who redeems himself in the act of saving Jessica and Roger Rabbit. Through conventional cinematography and editing which center on Valiant as he pursues his investigation, the audience follows his gaze. Valiant visually reacts to Jessica Rabbit as if she were a person rather than just a drawing, but he also enacts fear of her, in keeping with the familiar pattern of the *femme fatale* and detective hero in *films noirs*. Jessica Rabbit comically embodies several different allusions to iconic types of women in film both animated and live action. She appears as a humorously hypersexualized signer and wife to Roger Rabbit. Her physical manifestation parodies both *films noirs'* *femmes fatales* and some early animated characters such as Tex Avery's *Red Hot Riding Hood* or Betty Boop. Those other animated female characters—who do appear human— similarly exhibit exaggerated physical markers of femininity that serve their common narrative structures which include the seduction of the male rabbits, wolves, and people around them. Jessica has enormous breasts, an impossibly small waist, and constantly moving hips. The very low cut tight

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of such animators as Chuck Jones, Ub Iwerks and Tex Avery. Warner Brothers Pictures, The Walt Disney Company, and the Fleischer Studios, through Paramount Pictures, all released theatrical short films during the time, and The Walt Disney Company began making the first American feature animation *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. See Michael Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

dress has a slit that goes up to her hip revealing her long legs with each step. She appears as an exaggerated Barbie doll for adults.

Jessica Rabbit's physical appearance, her job as a nightclub singer, and her limited social position establish her as an object for sexual desire. A scene in which she dances in the club demonstrates the gaze as the overwhelmingly male audience gawks and whistles at her sexy performance. Comically, the character even goes so far as to perform the toon equivalent of sex, playing "patty cake," to help her husband's career. The spectator watches Jessica play patty cake through Valiant's camera and an office window highlighting the mechanism of the voyeuristic gaze. Her animated figure does not reduce or nullify her objectification in and through the film; in fact the extreme exaggeration of her body amplifies and emphasizes her physical sexuality to a degree not humanly possible.

Jessica Rabbit does not appear as a typical *femme fatale*. Not only does the character enjoy a happy ending, but her performance inverts the experiences of most conventional *femmes fatales*. The traditional *femme fatale* begins by seeming vulnerable and generally innocent, but as the film progresses she becomes more obviously manipulative and dangerous for the hero. Her threat typically increases as the film goes on, whereas Jessica Rabbit's characterization occurs in reverse. She begins the film seeming like an adulterous threat and ends the film as Roger's happy wife. Just as Mulvey's article suggests is typical for female characters, Valiant and the camera in *Rabbit* both treat Jessica as a typically objectified female lead. The first sustained shot follows her as she begins to sing in the club. She walks around with her chest out as men visibly ogle her, as psychoanalytic theorists such as Mulvey have discussed. Her performance serves as a spectacle that the film narrative pauses to allow the spectator to watch and appreciate. Her actions are also dangerous to Valiant, for she brings him into a threatening situation. In the film,

she quickly occasions problems for Valiant and puts him at risk both from violent weasel thugs and his potential love interest, the live action Dolores. While he controls much of the action of the film, his anxiety over the influence of Jessica Rabbit suggests his fear of castration by the provocative *femme fatale* type. The figures in *Rabbit* who most ogle Jessica—as the audience of the film can readily see—are primarily male characters who are filmed as live action actors. This seeming objectification of the drawn woman, who is an object in a literal way, thus occurs through live action characters that model this behavior for the cinematic audience. Jessica Rabbit's role, especially in the beginning of the film, is not limited by her character's being "only" animated, for she plays the classic *femme fatale* as both dangerous and sexualized. She carries guns, hits a live action character over the head with a frying pan, and hires Eddie Valiant to find her husband.

While Jessica Rabbit does not seem to look back at the audience to the extent that, for example, Marlene Dietrich did in some of her films, Gaylyn Studlar's interpretation of the possibility of submitting to her in a masochistic gesture as the figure or image of the controlling mother. Studlar asserts that this gesture allows for female identification by arguing, "The female is not developmentally excluded from scopophilia, disavowal, or fetishism, nor is she excluded from the enunciative mechanisms or an apparatus dependent on these."<sup>101</sup> This pre-oedipal approach theorizes how viewers may gain pleasure psychoanalytically also through identification with a masochistic position in relation to powerful female characters, as well as the conventional gaze-bearing protagonist (in this instance Valiant).

Ultimately, a difference between Jessica and a typical *femme fatale* does arise: her story comes to a happy conclusion as she returns to her status as loyal wife. At the end of the film,

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<sup>101</sup>Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 48.

Jessica Rabbit's husband is found safe, and he gives her his love letter, which turns out to be a will saving Toontown and all of the toons. This provides a classic Hollywood happy ending where the "good" characters including Jessica Rabbit, Roger Rabbit, Eddie Valiant, and most of the familiar toons get to return to normal and the "bad" characters or evil toons are gone or destroyed. It is perhaps her malleable animated nature that allows Jessica to return to cartoon normalcy when the many live action *femmes fatales* die or suffer at the end of their films. While *films noirs* suggest and generally portray unfortunate endings for the *femmes fatales*, such an ending is all but unthinkable for the types of classical animated films that *Rabbit* refers to.

*Rabbit* alludes to *film noir* limitations throughout, yet many young audiences of this film would not have been familiar with classic *noir*, and would probably not have expected a pretty heroine, animated or otherwise, to suffer for her hypersexualized and dangerous nature. Because the film's apparently happy ending deviates from the tradition of *film noir*, other characters *Rabbit* besides Jessica Rabbit are subject to this variation. But Jessica Rabbit's transformation seems most radical, compared to her characterization at the film's outset, when she returns to her status as wife and its implied domesticity with Roger.

As I outlined in Chapter One, cultural studies approaches often examine spectators as particular viewers whose awareness of film may shift in response to their social and cultural perspective. Working from a cultural studies approach, Michael Cohen argues that *Rabbit* represents blacks in America in the 1940s not through evident physical racial characteristics, but rather in the situations and characteristics of the animated toons who undeniably echo the stereotypes and historical conditions of African Americans. The toons in *Rabbit* visually appear raced as either white humans or as non-human. Many animated figures of the Golden Age took the form of animals e.g., characters such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Pluto, Bugs Bunny,

Porky Pig, etc. appear as animals. Those characters who appear as human, e.g., Betty Boop, Yosemite Sam, and Baby Herman, exhibit racialized traits appear to be racially white.

In an anthologized article, “The Detective as Other: The Detective Versus the Other,” Cohen argues that the social relationships between the live action characters and the toons bear a striking resemblance to racial relations between blacks and whites in the 1940s.<sup>102</sup> He sees the animated characters in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* representing some of the worst stereotypes of blacks in America. He sees the similarities as including how the cartoons appear and how they are treated.

Physically they are strong, practically indestructible, but they are also unpredictable and emotional. They are more affected by liquor than sober whites. They are colorful and interesting, vibrant and alive, but also threatening and dangerous. The danger and fascination come together in the sexiness that is part of the stereotype as well.<sup>103</sup>

Cohen goes on to assert that when these films “encode racial stereotypes as cartoon characters,” they become possibly more negative than the same stereotype apparent in live action characters, because cartoon characters implicitly are communicating not being human or more pointedly,

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<sup>102</sup> Michael Cohen, “The Detective as Other: The Detective Versus the Other,” in *Diversity and Detective Fiction*, ed. Kathleen Gregory Klein (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1999), 144. Others who have noted the racialized depictions in the film include Robert Zemeckis’ commentary, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, directed by Robert Zemeckis (1988; Hollywood California: Touchstone Pictures, 2003.), DVD.; Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Reviews: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*” *Film Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), 33-37.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

according to Cohen, “subhuman.” For spectators, cartoon characters are objects in ways that live action characters can resist being through their presence in the world outside of the film. The implication of further objectification establishes an insidious depiction of minority figures and redoubles Jessica Rabbits’ position as the female object for the male gaze.

Cultural studies understandings of the characters in *Rabbit*, I would argue, demonstrate the problems created in live action negative characterizations, but may not wholly account for the exaggerated animated form in several ways. Some familiar techniques of creating humor in American animated film further the absurdity of the figures on screen, which can alter the implications of the raced or gendered representations of characters in ways theories addressing live action films do not account for. The impetus to make Roger Rabbit funny because his role is the typically animated rabbit seems to have led animators to make him fundamentally absurd. Roger is a white-haired and floppy-eared rabbit with a garishly colored polka dot bowtie and childlike overalls paired with extremely long feet and ears. His demeanor appears comically optimistic and positive. This absurdity makes him a negative stereotype and, according to Cohen, a negative African American stereotype. Roger’s animated form, which classifies him as a toon and a second class citizen in the film, may allow his absurdity to evade the same scrutiny from spectators that live action depictions of African Americans might receive.

Certainly some spectators might not readily discern any racial implications in the film or the toons as emblematic of African Americans. The arguments of cultural studies cinema scholar bell hooks suggest, however, that some alert spectators would see such suggestions. The encoding of racial elements becomes immediately apparent to spectators viewing within some social contexts and from viewing positions that entail the recognition. Thus, for example, hooks speaks of her own and her friends’ awareness of negative racial stereotypes in film and its

significance for similar audiences. In particular, hooks presents the black female audience as a formation of viewers at once alert to and often engaged in watching films from an oppositional perspective, as she draws on Hall and Gledhill's theorization of the concept. She sees black female audiences as distinctive in their viewing practices: "Identifying with neither the phallogentric gaze nor the construction of white womanhood as black, critical black female spectators construct a theory of looking relations where cinematic visual delight is the pleasure of interrogation."<sup>104</sup>

Although hooks does not refer explicitly to animated film, the characters in *Rabbit*, like their live action counterparts, are clearly subject to such active viewers and interrogations of texts and the looking relations and character depictions they include. As Cohen's critique of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* explicitly demonstrates, animated characters do not inherently evade examination by the attentive spectator; indeed, such viewers might find the constructed nature of animated figures would compound the issues of purposive characterization that come across to the viewer as clearly racist.

The Disney Corporation designed *Rabbit* and also *Dragon* in part as comedies. Mixed animation and live action films arise in the American filmmaking tradition of entirely animated films that use humor as a predominant component of the narrative, addressed pointedly to appeal to a presumably mainstream audience. American animation (in contrast to some practices in Eastern Europe and elsewhere) has long emphasized comedy as a genre, beginning with characters like Winsor McCay's Little Nemo (1911—earlier as a newspaper cartoon) and Pat Sullivan and Otto Messmer's Felix the Cat (from 1919 on). Subsequently, Walt Disney, Ub Iwerks, and associates linked humorous visual animation to audible humor in the early Mickey

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<sup>104</sup> bell hooks, *Reel to Real* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 208.

Mouse shorts with sound like *Steamboat Willie* (1928). Disney animation has also always incorporated humor into its feature films beginning with *Snow White*'s comical dwarves. In service of the humor, some characters (e.g., Dopey and Grumpy) often appear as objects of ridicule or the butt of the jokes. When the characters depict social minorities, the characterization of some figures as laughable readily falls into racist stereotypes. The humor in *Rabbit* follows in such traditions of comedic animation, for a number of the animated characters seem absurd and generally the butt of the jokes. For example, Roger Rabbit, cannot help but finish the tune, "Shave and a Haircut" started by another character knocking. Roger's response characterizes Roger mockingly as lacking impulse control, even in the face of a life threatening situation.

As cultural studies theorists of spectatorship such as hooks and Cohen have demonstrated, spectator awareness of gendered and raced characters can influence the understanding of cinematic works. Yet when spectators' awareness of characters is altered by, for example, their animal shapes, then spectators' comprehension may also shift. Jerry Palmer's arguments, drawing on Freudian psychoanalytic theory informed by cultural studies, can help us understand how animation enables the camouflaging of gender and race as an element of humor in film. As noted in Chapter One, Palmer argues that a spectator's awareness of the "teller" of a "joke" shapes how a listener will understand the joke. The teller's race can inform audience response to race-based jokes. If the teller's race is camouflaged, those viewers who do not recognize racial encoding respond differently from viewers who do. For example, the audience's comprehension of Rogers' verbal and physical humor does not receive the immediate scrutiny from spectators that it might if Roger appeared physically drawn as an African American human. Different spectators' awareness and understanding of race and film may lead to a variety of viewer perspectives that differently discern race in animation, and thus perceive the humor in



animated characters and their jokes in divergent ways. By exhibiting race in both live action and animated characters side by side, *Rabbit* isolates race into the categories of voice and visually animated characterizations. Animated characters bear marks of social difference in ways that may camouflage those depictions through animal or otherwise embodied forms. Because the American feature animation market often emphasizes comedy, these figures also become exaggerated for comic effect. Thereby nonhuman animated bodies may at once camouflage human racial characteristics and heighten other registers of racial encoding. Race becomes entirely mediated, generally making the depiction of race more exaggerated and prominent. Yet, again, spectators' different perspectives on the depictions and often jokes about race may inform their interpretations of characters.

Theories of spectatorship developed in line with queer theory also warrant assessment against the workings of *Rabbit*'s depiction of sexuality. Although *Rabbit* does not imply or raise the issue of homosexuality except as a comic moment of discomfort that Valiant exhibits when Roger Rabbit kisses him, the film raises issues that spectators may read as "socially deviant" sexuality in its implications of sexual relationships between toons and humans.<sup>105</sup> First the film establishes playing "patty cake" as the toon alternative to sex, by treating Jessica Rabbit's having allegedly played that "game" with another character as a form of adultery. Valiant photographs her playing "patty cake" with Marvin Acme and later shows the photos to Roger to emotionally devastating effect. This children's game becomes the animated characters' equivalent of sex, for

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<sup>105</sup> Similar issues in mixed species relationships have been discussed in relation to other animated films. José Piedra, "Gender Ducking: Three Caballeros" *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 39 (1994) 72-82.; Eric Smoodin, *Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons from the Sound Era* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 5.

otherwise, apparently, sex does not exist for cartoons. Thus despite the overt sexuality of their behavior and appearance, these marginalized characters cannot sexually consummate their relationships. The conceit to avoid animated sex may have arisen in relation to projected audiences for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, including children, rather than traditions of animation more generally, as certainly pornographic animation has long circulated. Indeed, animation's frequent overemphasis of bodily characteristics and action has led to greatly exaggerated sexual depictions, as Jose B. Capino has argued.<sup>106</sup> Yet *Rabbit* neatly sidesteps possibly taboo sexual implications by infantilizing the act as "patty cake." Arguably, however, for adult audiences of the eventually PG-rated film, such an understanding of sexual practices would certainly seem to reveal the relationships as "queer," both those that appear trans-species like Roger and Jessica Rabbit and those between animated and live action figures.

Queer approaches of cinema have, like most theories of film spectatorship, to date generally focused on live action film. Theorists such as Dyer have examined cinema as an object of spectator attention within a larger context that encompasses all of a spectator's experiences. Dyer explicitly discusses depictions of homosexuality and presumed heterosexuality in classic *film noir*, to argue:

Sexuality independent of the hero is shown to be neurotic, frustrated, and sour; yet it also means that the hero's own sexuality goes unchallenged. Approached by a faggot, or a *femme fatale*, the hero has the whole moral force of Hollywood and Western culture and male chauvinism to fall back on in order to refuse the offer.

But in this way, his own sexual adequacy is not tested. It is of course to be

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<sup>106</sup> Jose B. Capino, "Filthy Funnies: Notes on the Body in Animated Pornography," *Animation Journal*, no. 12 (2004): 53-72.

assumed—film noir does not call the potency of male sexuality into question. Yet there hovers around it an implication of male uncertainty about sexuality. Here the gay characters start to serve a different function from that of the *femmes fatales*.<sup>107</sup>

Dyer's description of a "frustrated" lead character fits Eddie Valiant and his interactions with Jessica Rabbit. That figure works at once as the threatening *femme fatale* and as queer in her exaggerated animated human body and her patty cake sexuality. Her sexuality continues to suggest uncertainty about her marriage to an animated rabbit. For Dyer, such queer relationships set up contrasts for heroes of *films noirs*: "Heroes just are sexually adequate unless we are told to the contrary. And to deflect any doubts that linger, we have such unambiguously sick images of frustration and maliciousness as the *femmes fatales*, nymphos, queers and dykes."<sup>108</sup> Such uncomfortable relationships between the animated and the non-animated or between different species create an uncomfortable contrast for spectators. *Rabbit*'s non-heteronormative relationships fit into animation's long history of finding humor in traditional markers of gender. Bugs Bunny's frequently appearing in female and raced drag is an obvious example, but *Rabbit* also incorporates "gender-bending" techniques across its array of characters and cinematic modes. Thereby we can discern the applicability of theories of spectatorship relating to gender as well as to humor in animated film.

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<sup>107</sup> Richard Dyer, "Homosexuality and Film Noir," *Jump Cut*, no. 16 (1977): 20.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

## Queer Theories in Relation to *The Reluctant Dragon*

*The Reluctant Dragon* is based on a story originally published in an 1898 collection of children's fantasy fiction by Kenneth Grahame, entitled *Dream Days*. The story has been printed, illustrated, and edited various ways and in different languages since its original edition.<sup>109</sup> The original print version of *The Reluctant Dragon* included a framing story about a young boy who discovers a dragon's footprints in the snow, which several of the edited versions and the film exclude. While neither the story nor the film version produced early in 1941 by Disney Studios receive significant publicity today, the tale's longevity suggests its capacity to compel.

The Disney version of *Dragon* integrates a live action narrative that frames the presentation of several animated shorts. The film begins by showing the then well-known humorist writer Robert Benchley, playing himself, as he floats in a pool shooting fake ducks with a toy gun, then comically sinking into the water when his rubber raft deflates. Mrs. Benchley, played by Nana Bryant, condescendingly commands her reluctant husband to try to interest Walt Disney in filming the children's book she has been reading aloud to him, Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon*. The submissive and infantilized Benchley petulantly objects but eventually acquiesces to his wife's wishes. Mrs. Benchley drives the reluctant and complaining Robert to the Disney studio grounds, where she leaves him to his task.

Notwithstanding Benchley's character's being evidently childish and henpecked, he fulfills a function in the opening as the film's primary figure of identification for the spectator. As seen through psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives as proposed by, e.g., Mulvey,

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<sup>109</sup> The dissertation's bibliography includes five different editions of the book published between 1898 through 2005.

Benchley's character initially made somewhat comical also due to his somewhat rotund body (playing a kind of "fat man" stereotype as he floats on the rubber raft), enacts his role as a hapless, helpless man who is nonetheless (or seems to think he is) thereby charming. Benchley is also clearly the "star" of the film (from the credits and his known image at that time). Especially once his character arrives at Disney Studios, he takes up a role as an internal spectator who within the film itself models cinema spectatorship, as understood from psychoanalytic perspectives.

The title of the Disney film is misleading, in that the story of the Grahame book comprises only a minor portion of the film—as an animated short which the Disney company has already made and which Benchley gets to watch toward the end of the film along with Walt Disney and some "boys" (animators), as Walt refers to them, in the studio screening room. As a character visiting Disney's Burbank studios, Benchley exhibits an almost child-like curiosity as he wanders through the well-groomed studio grounds, while avoiding his hyper-enthusiastic guide and his meeting with Disney. Evading the guide, Benchley takes a seemingly accidental self-guided tour through the studio's different creative departments. Each department shows an animated short demonstrating that area's specialty to Benchley and to the audience. In one instance a cel (single celluloid painting) of Donald Duck being photographed shifts into an animated sequence, in which Donald explains how he is made to appear to walk. In another scene, writers create storyboards for another new cartoon, *Baby Weems*, then share the work with Benchley and the audience. The final cartoon that the studio workers show Benchley and the actual audience is the animated short film adaptation of the book *The Reluctant Dragon*. The short film-within-the-film shows a notably effeminate and peace-loving dragon who wants to write poetry and laze around his cave, rather than fight or pillage as expected of him. The

dragon, a knight, and a shepherd's son who has discovered and befriended the dragon together devise a plan to deceive the village into believing that the knight is battling the dragon and has tamed him. Thus the trio avoids actually having to engage in the bloody battle that the villagers evidently relish seeing.

The guided tour that Benchley goes on— and the film's spectators with him structure the film as a staged live action documentary, which as noted presents the workings of the Disney studio. The mixed mode allowed the production of a much less expensive feature film than an entirely animated work and helped keep Disney financially afloat (after losses incurred with the expense of producing and distributing *Fantasia* in 1940–1941) until its next feature-length animated film *Dumbo* (1942) could be completed and released.<sup>110</sup> Throughout the tour of the studio, which constitutes about two-thirds of the film's length, Benchley serves as a narrative device and a conventional male figure of identification, even as his infantilized comic character provides a somewhat childlike position of spectatorship. Along with Benchley, we watch varied departments make the discrete components of animation, including seeing Disney workers in an almost poetic scene of colors flowing and mixing. Women in white lab coats mix paints and color a cel of Bambi that briefly “comes to life” in a short animated scene. In *Dragon*, the female workers are shown primarily as painters; we also see several performing as character voices. In contrast, the film shows men drawing, writing, and directing the animated works. In other parts of the studio, Foley artists create noises to generate cartoon sound tracks and cinematographers operate an impressive-looking multi-plane camera developed initially by Ub Iwerks.

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<sup>110</sup> Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art, and Commerce of Walt Disney* (Chicago, Illinois: Ivan R. Dee Inc., 1968), 257.

The live action film thus offers a kind of anthology format for presenting portions of unrelated cartoons, while it simultaneously markets the Disney operation as a technologically forward-looking company located on an attractive campus-like grounds with many happy, collaborating, talented workers. Walt Disney himself also appears very welcoming and relaxed. The irony of this feature length commercial for the studio itself was that even as the film was being produced, the workers were attempting to form a union to redress what many saw as inequities and grievances in the Disney workplace. The unresolved issues in face of Walt Disney's adamant opposition to unionization led by May 1941 to many of the animators and other workers going on strike only weeks before the film's June 20 release in 1941.<sup>111</sup> The news of the period about labor disputes and employees' unhappiness with working conditions strongly contrast to *Dragon's* live action depictions of happy, eager Disney employees.<sup>112</sup>

Like the live action sequences, albeit in masked form, the film's major animated sequence was enmeshed in political issues of the time. Through its depiction of a pointedly non-violent title character, the short *The Reluctant Dragon* simultaneously presented and arguably mocked the dragon as a pacifist. Certainly viewers of the film at the time would have been aware of the World War that had been raging for almost two years in Europe and longer in Asia; whether the U.S. would join would likely have been uppermost in viewers' minds. In fact, only six months after the film's release, the U.S. did declare war on the Axis Powers. The short film's treatment of the (un)willingness to do battle, although intrinsic to the 1898 children's book, emerges as a complex issue in the context of the film's production and release. The dragon's

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 253, 258.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 256-262.

pacifism implies he is antiwar, yet the film's depiction of pacifism as the trait of a silly effeminate dragon implies that the film is not advocating an antiwar agenda in the U.S.

Although the film was a critical and box office failure, *Dragon* offers a rich site for exploring a number of theoretical perspectives on spectatorship in relation to both live action filmmaking and animation—and the possible differences between those.<sup>113</sup> For example, the realization of gender and looking relations by Benchley and the Disney workers readily yields to feminist psychoanalytic theories. In one live action scene, some artists are attending a drawing class, and as the errant Benchley (having evaded his official guide) peers into the room, we hear the male art teacher's instructions: "There are just a couple little things I'd like you all to keep in mind, be sure to bring out the sweep of her torso, and the modeling of those hips, the texture of her skin is also essential, as well as the highlights and shadows." The dialogue implies that the model is a nude female, which is certainly the impression Benchley gets. The scene then comically plays on Benchley's inept attempt to objectify the model by sneaking into the class to watch, before the punch line revelation that the model is an elephant. While the film does not actually fulfill Benchley's desire to objectify a female, the comic turn does rely upon that expectation of the kind of voyeurism and objectification as described by Mulvey. Benchley's inability to find a real woman at this point in the film reinforces his inadequacy and infantilization.

As Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" argues occurs in classical Hollywood films, *Dragon* positions the live action Benchley as the character for identification and establishes his anxiety over facing the studio's patriarch, Disney.<sup>114</sup> After the failure to gain

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>114</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 6-18.



visual pleasure from looking at the model he had imagined, Benchley gazes longingly at an attractive studio employee called Doris who takes him under her wing; Doris is one of the numerous female workers in the painting department. She becomes the object of his interest through the balance of the film as she escorts him through the studios. Benchley's anxiety at being caught avoiding his scheduled meeting with Walt Disney, while spending time with Doris, suggests the fear of castration, for the infantilized Benchley seems to fear the paternalistic studio head catching him with "his" women. The mild mannered, lovely Doris does not appear to challenge or return Benchley's gaze. Doris' passivity cannot be easily compared with an animated counterpart in this film, as *Dragon* contains no significant animated female characters. However, as animated depictions of masculinity in *Dragon* become "queered," as I will discuss, the standard gender roles demonstrated in the live action portions appear especially predictable. Altogether, the live action elements of the film appear to conform to the standard gender roles in classical Hollywood films as outlined by Mulvey and others.

In being aligned with Benchley narratively and through conventional Hollywood editing (point of view shots and other means of suture), viewers in effect also tour Disney's animation studio and meet the staff.<sup>115</sup> As Benchley wanders around smiling and laughing at the cartoon shorts and at the Foley artists making noise for the cartoon sound tracks (which, in contradiction to how animation is produced, are being made after the fact to accompany the completed cartoon that we see.); he serves as an example for the film's spectator. Benchley's standing as a popular comedian and writer would have augmented that role at the film's initial release. Benchley's model of spectatorship anchors what in Stuart Hall's terms is a dominant reading of the spectacle of the Disney studio and its live action and animated inhabitants. His appreciation and clear

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<sup>115</sup> I use the term alignment here as Murray Smith describes it, as discussed in Chapter Two.

affection for the studio and its characters do not raise critical questions about the entirely white staff or the presence of female artists only in voicing characters and filling in the outlines of male artists' work with color. Especially a spectator perceiving the film from a contextually informed position (knowing of the on-going labor struggles which also involved the underpaid women workers) might have instead made a negotiated, or even oppositional reading of the film questioning the idealization of Disney Studios. Benchley's character uncritically accepts the world the film presents him within both the live action and animated modes. Benchley thereby models from within the film Hall's theory of the dominant decoding a text lays out for spectators. This film establishes largely traditional gender roles in the live action portion of the film that reinforce dominant views through identification with the central male character, as understood from psychoanalytic film theories.

In contrast, the cartoon short framed within the larger film as a screening that Benchley attends with Disney and studio employees, also entitled *The Reluctant Dragon*, remains much more open than the live action sequences to both negotiated and oppositional readings. The primary animated sequences in *Dragon* depict a less traditionally gendered character and invite a greater variation in interpretations, depending on how the audience perceives particularly the cel-animated dragon's mannerisms and demeanor. The short offers socially critical portrayals that, if analyzed in keeping with Hall's oppositional approach, might appear to communicate ambiguities or even contradictory stances on gender—and possibly on pacifism.

*The Reluctant Dragon*, as noted, is drawn as an effeminate dragon, and voiced by a British actor, Barnett Parker. The somewhat rotund turquoise-colored figure is encoded as “fey” or “gay/queer,” through shots of his playing a flute, reciting verse, singing along with birds, speaking in a high voice, and gesturing with stereotypically effeminate mannerisms. This

atypical dragon, who expressly seeks to avoid confrontation and can barely bring forth a little cough of smoke, exhibits such a queer persona or, simply, appears so feminine that in an early newspaper review of the film, one writer referred to the dragon as a she, referring to the figure as a “harmless old biddy.”<sup>116</sup>

An imaginative boy from a nearby village, which is coded as medieval and European, discovers the dragon and, to stage what the boy takes to be a requisite battle, locates and brings to the dragon’s cave a stumbling old knight, Sir Giles, voiced by another British actor, Claude Allister. Sir Giles, it turns out, similarly likes poetry. Upon hearing that the dragon will not fight, Sir Giles says “He won’t fight? Preposterous! Well, that fellow must be an infernal cad. Bit of a rotter.” Not only does Giles initially believe in fighting, but he also finds it “preposterous!” to consider an alternative. Later the dragon sings about himself, “They call me the timid dragon. What a rot, I’m not. I just won’t fight. I’d rather play. I know I won’t get hurt that way.” This denial by the dragon that he is “not a rot” makes it clear that he believes others perceive his pacifism negatively. Several other characters including the boy say that they expect fighting and that any alternative seems impossible or ridiculous. In establishing the humor in this film, these comments reinforce the expectations of the audience that dragons should fight and be violent, before the dragon contradicts this assumption. This dialogue also normalizes violence and presents the dragon’s pacifist approach as abnormal or even explicitly “queer.”

The desire of the obviously British-sounding effeminate dragon to avoid action or, more pointedly, violence makes him interesting in both gender and political terms. While no significant characters in the animated short are marked as female, the dragon demonstrates

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<sup>116</sup> “‘*The Reluctant Dragon*,’ a Walt Disney Compound of Fact and Fancy, Opens at the Palace.”

*New York Times* (New York), Jul 25, 1941. 12.

several characteristics that connote femininity. The dragon's atypical gender according to the classic Hollywood standard of masculinity being shown comically communicates to spectators that an exaggerated effeminate male is laughable. The dragon's femininity reads as absurd and therefore funny to audiences both for its incongruity with his male coding and his being a dragon which is often conceived of as a masculine imaginary creature. As Jerry Palmer asserts, creating a moment that undermines expectations can contribute to a joke's humor, and showing this creature which people often imagine as aggressive and animalistic ultimately as neither of those things is funny.<sup>117</sup> The reluctant dragon notably counters the villagers' expectations and also those of contemporary viewers, in his choice of stereotypically cultured and refined pastimes. These choices inflect both the gender and the political implications of this character's persona.

In view of the on-going bloody battles the British were fighting in mid-1941 to defend their territory and that of the Allies, audiences (and the animators) for this film—within—the film could easily have read political significance into the apparent non-violent position of the comical British dragon. While the dragon's non-violent approach does result in a happy ending within the short, the animated *Reluctant Dragon* derives most of its humor from the antics of the effeminate dragon. For example, the dragon takes a shower in a small waterfall, demurely asking the boy to turn around, while the dragon scampers off to hide behind a rock, giggling and holding his tail around him like a towel as if to hide his nudity. He behaves coyly as if to avoid objectification, which, following Mulvey, male characters do not typically do, as they are not conventionally visually objectified. Similarly, his desire to avoid action places him in a typically passive feminine role. Altogether, the film ultimately seems to caricature the dragon as a comically feminized male, whose markedly queer persona contradicts not only the common Western

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<sup>117</sup> Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd*, 40.

casting of dragons as monsters but also the expectations for Hollywood narrative films (including shorts) for an active male character as described in psychoanalytic film theory, as a hero or at minimum clear point of audience identification.

While the original book establishes the dragon as a non-aggressive character, it is the Disney film that visually depicts the dragon as effeminate: he prances on his toes, daintily pours tea, and bats his long eyelashes. The animation itself pushes and exaggerates the gender roles that Mulvey describes twenty years later as conventional Hollywood depictions. Making the non-violent character effeminate draws connections between the notions of masculinity and violence or femininity and non-violence, yet the caricatured nature of most animation further exaggerates the ridiculous elements of a figure and it makes the non-violent effeminate dragon seem campy. Such over-the-top stylization of animation enables the campy portrayal, which arguably conceals political implications of the dragon's "deviant" engendering.

Through the depiction of the pseudo-medieval village residents' expectations, *Dragon* offers a dominant reading that establishes the community's social norms while still providing some criticism of them in the happy, non-violent resolution. The ending occurs as the dragon generates smoke to fool the villagers into believing that he and the knight are fighting while they yell and even dance together out of sight of the villagers. In the theorization of queerness, by Alexander Doty, the dragon's depiction offers a queered figure which the audience can interpret from their own frame of reference. As Christine Gledhill argues, before spectators necessarily negotiate meaning in media, they confront the artists themselves that must initially have negotiated the very aesthetic of the dragon before the spectators can begin to approach the work. The spectators' frame of reference, objectives, and opinions would then have been influenced by the exaggerated embodiment of queerness on screen. According to Gledhill, these images would

become a part of their experience with “institutions, texts, and audiences.”<sup>118</sup> The very body of the queered dragon appears comically and overdramatically queer heightening the experience of the effeminate male for spectators.

In the full film *Dragon*, Benchley and the dragon both play roles that offer comic relief. Benchley’s inept objectification of the elephant model, his doe-eyed looks at Doris, as well as his handling of a female centaur figurine from *Fantasia* (a bare-breasted African woman from waist up, a zebra from waist down) characterizes his masculinity as comic. In contrast to Benchley’s, the dragon’s “performance” affirms only the gender stereotypes inscribed onto him by the animators. Despite the existence of the children’s (illustrated) storybook, it seems that the Dragon, unlike Benchley or even a very well-known animated character like Mickey Mouse, has no capacity as an independent figure to bring known extratextual associations into the spectator’s experience of the film, and so stands only as the animated film offers the character: as a non-threatening caricature that informs spectators’ understanding of queerness and gender (which, however, gay audiences, following Doty, might well “queer”). One might, however, speculatively consider how Donald Crafton’s recent argument that animated characters can resemble live action stars in their influence and audience interaction, might yield an additional perspective on such a character.<sup>119</sup> Conceivably, following Crafton’s argument, if the Dragon’s image were reproduced in merchandise or in other films or media forms, spectators aware of the film might perceive the figure’s marked “queerness” in other contexts.

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<sup>118</sup> Christine Gledhill, ““Pleasurable Negotiations,”” in *Female Spectators*, ed. Pribram D. (London: Version, 1988), 169.

<sup>119</sup> Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse*, 89.

In *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, for example, Disney's queer dragon appears with many other Disney and Warner Brother's animated characters in the last scene as the assembly celebrates the resolution of the mystery. All of the animated characters from many different cartoons stand together and sing. Seeing familiar animated characters in the final scene of *Rabbit* may have evoked for viewers nostalgia or recognition of their animated "careers." Certainly Betty Boop possesses star presence more effectively than the Reluctant Dragon, but only because, just like a live action star might, her persona remains better known. The Dragon's very brief appearance in the background of *Rabbit*'s finale does not attract notice because most audiences have not seen *Dragon*. Viewers who do recognize the dragon in the figure's characterization in the 1941 film could serve further to inflect the queer tone of the 1988 film, as discussed above.

*Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *The Reluctant Dragon* both provide rich material to analyze comparatively the usefulness of psychoanalytic theories of film spectatorship and cultural studies approaches to the workings of the animated as well as the live action portions of these mixed form films, and, most intriguingly, of the forms in direct interaction within the film. Psychoanalytic theories do in large part function for animation as for live action, in the ways that gender representations are shaped by the gaze of the "camera" or the frame of the shot and the diegetic objectification by male characters. The capacity of animation to construct female figures such as Jessica's *femme fatale* generates those looking relations also in animation. However, the spectators' interactions with such figures as the Reluctant Dragon may differ due to the figure's embodiment as an animated, talking animal. The very "toon" nature of the cartoons in *Rabbit* also, as Cohen argues, creates an object that, when paired with social markers that indicate race, may shape spectators' interaction with a character, allowing for perhaps even less sympathy with

cartoon characters that by convention cannot die or suffer pain. Spectators on and off screen still objectify Jessica Rabbit, but actual spectators arguably see the character as different from a live actor filmed performing for the viewers' pleasure. A live action film might undercut such a performer appearing as a subject and treat her as an object, but audiences know that Jessica Rabbit was always only an object in fact as well as cinematic realization. As the character herself argues in the character's most famous line: "I'm not bad, I'm just drawn that way."



Chapter Four:  
Hearing Music and Star Voices:  
How Theories of Spectatorship Pertain to Animated Sound

In this chapter, I address how psychoanalytic and cognitive theories of spectatorship in relation to film music and sound effects seem generally to pertain to animation film as they do for live action film. Such continuity in reception of film's "aural" impact seems to hold even though audiences likely have more awareness than when watching live action film that the sound track for an animated film is necessarily constructed entirely separately from the images. However, I will argue that theories addressing spectator response to voice in film and its connection to the figure speaking require revision to account for the impact of that most human dimension of film sound. For example, some dominant psychoanalytic theories about the workings of the voice in film cannot always account for the voice in animated films without revision and adjustment, largely, I will argue, because the voice is not anchored in a body that spectators understand to have the capacity of speech. Cultural studies approaches to star studies that can account for the impact of known voice actors' images on spectators prove more productive for analyzing animation, yet still require some revision to account for animated characters' own independent "star" presence.

This chapter examines two primary strands of film sound in animation, music and sound effects (which I will argue in the first half of the chapter both operate similarly in animation and live action films) and voice, which I focus on in the balance of the chapter. In the chapter's second half, I point to necessary revisions in theories of spectatorial experience of live action film to account for audiences making sense of the differently constructed and imagined

connections of voices heard to the characters who “speak” and also to any recognized (star) actors who provide the voices from off-screen.

In voicing drawn characters, which range in identities far beyond the speaking individuals in most live action film (e.g., a cricket, a dragon, fire), a performer communicates, obviously or more subtly, qualities of race, gender, and physical form which are distinct from but may draw upon the voice actor’s previous performances or star image. Animation’s capacity at once to depict and efface marks of race and gender mapped onto an anthropomorphized character—creature or inanimate object as well as caricatured humans—tends, I posit, to reduce audience perceptions of those social facets of characterization, even though the human voices that help bring the animated characters “alive” generally encode such markers. This chapter tests theories of sound and voice and of vocal performers’ star images as these theories have developed from psychoanalytic, cognitive, and cultural studies approaches for their relevance to animation spectatorship. I give special attention to the impact of known (even “star actor”) vocal performers on viewer perception of animated racial and gender representations. My analysis involves case studies of three animated feature films, all having an international theme or production history: *The Illusionist* (2010), *Mulan* (1998), and *Howl’s Moving Castle* (2004). I argue in sum that these case studies reveal that theories of voice in film in relation to spectatorship require adjustment to account for the mode of animation.

The 2010 cel and computer generated animated feature *L’illusionniste* (*The Illusionist*), offers a particularly interesting case study of sound’s working in animation, due to the film’s reliance on sound effects in lieu of dialogue. Based on a script written by Jacques Tati and Henri Marquet in the early 1950s, the film was adapted by animator-director Sylvain Chomet and features an almost mime-like style of animated character performance inspired by the original

writer of the story and the explicit inspiration for the film, the French filmmaker Jacques Tati.<sup>120</sup> The general absence of dialogue requires the viewer to focus more than usual for contemporary films on the sound effects and music which underscore the narrative, for those elements stand out as key components never subsumed to characters' voices, which over the course of the film enunciate only a few words.

Based loosely on Tati's life as an adult and imbued with his style of filmmaking, *The Illusionist* echoes in some regards Tati's five feature films, all entirely live action and all featuring himself as a largely miming actor. In its use of sound and music *The Illusionist* particularly resonates, I will argue, with Tati's 1967 film *Playtime*, often considered his masterpiece. A close comparison of the animated *Illusionist* and the live action *Playtime* brings into relief how both may undermine many audience expectations of feature sound films' uses of sound effects and music. Neither work represents a typical example of its mode (animated or live action), yet in their sound effects and music both in a sense lay bare the many conventions of film sound. The two features' similarities facilitate a focused comparative analysis of the workings of sound effects and music in film independent of dialogue in animation and live action works.

The commercially (and generally critically) highly successful cel-animated Disney production *Mulan* similarly serves as a useful example for considering the workings of sound in animation due to the film's distinctive use of voice to represent ethnicity transculturally. In relating a narrative about gender-crossing in a putative Chinese context, as the cross-dressing woman warrior Mulan goes to war in her father's place. *Mulan* repeatedly foregrounds in its

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<sup>120</sup> Dave Kehr, "Conjuring Tati's Spirit With Animation," *New York Times* (New York), October 29, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/31/movies/31kehr.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/31/movies/31kehr.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

dialogue and plot the delineation of gender in culture, albeit in a highly mixed, imaginary culture. *Mulan*'s formulation as an American film based on an ancient Chinese ballad raises questions about the effects of voice casting of star actors and of performers with particular cultural or accent-tinged inflections. That is, the casting of voices in *Mulan* offers an especially rich set of examples showing how voice in animation communicates race and gender, which becomes an effect of interest when the film producers promote the film as if those voices are familiar to audiences. Thus, the well-known African American actor Eddie Murphy voices an especially noteworthy character named Mushu, a miniature Chinese-style dragon that serves as comic relief through embodying a "coon" type sidekick.<sup>121</sup>

Finally *Howl's Moving Castle*, made by the renowned Ghibli Studios in Tokyo under the direction of Hayao Miyazaki, was distributed by the Disney Corporation through Buena Vista productions in the U.S. in both a subtitled and an English language version redubbed by American actors' voices. In their dubbing into multiple languages, as well as circulation across national and cultural borders, both *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Mulan* manifest the capacity of voice performers to shape characters for specific audiences. Thereby both films also reveal how the drawn characters exist in distinctive ways independent of a given vocal performance. The differences in voice characterizations in transcultural circulation of both titles also point to the animated film's flexibility in characterizing race and gender in relation to the influence of star voice actors (for both the original and the dubbed versions).

The uses of sound in the three feature films making up my case studies in this chapter bring established theories developed with regard to live action film sound into relief. To the

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<sup>121</sup> Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 1989), 7.

extent such theories prove to elucidate the perceived structure and impact of film sound, we can consider that the approaches do indeed pertain to animation. To the extent those established theories do not sufficiently account for our experience of known voice actors in relation to animated screen depictions, I will consider which alternate theories better explain the workings of film voice in animated features. In this chapter, I first summarize some overarching film historical issues in audio–spectatorship of sound in animation and then address several key established theories of sound in relation to film spectatorship, all with the metacritical aim of testing those theories’ utility for understanding sound’s uses and impact on animation.

### Issues in Perceiving Sound Effects and Music in Animation

As I have argued in earlier chapters, the technological differences between animation and live action sometimes complicate theories of media spectatorship, which to date in their development have taken mostly live action film as examples. At the same time, teasing out such potential differences creates opportunities for expanding theoretical understandings. Superficially, differences between the two filmic modes may seem clear when analyzing sound, in that animation’s single frame construction does not allow for any simultaneous sound recording, for of course animation is not initially recorded at the standard for live action sound film of twenty four frames per second in real time.

The slow creative process of constructing animation (whatever the technique, e.g., claymation, paper cut–out, cel, cgi, or combined approaches) precludes the recording of sound that arguably could have originated from the objects or figures seen on screen. A few experimental examples stand as an exception, like Norman McLaren’s animated *Dots* (1940), for

which the Canadian artist drew both the image that appears on screen and painted the light and dark patterns that create sound optically onto the portion of the film stock read by the projector's sound head. McLaren thus manually "animated" both sound and image, demonstrating the possibility of a direct correlation between animation images and sound, yet these examples remain extremely rare and do not appear in mainstream film. The processes of typical cel animation, for example, necessarily result in the sound and the image originating at different times and places. Most spectators understand the production gap between the animated image and sound recording, probably to a much greater extent than audiences realize the prevalence of similar disjunctions in creating sound in live action filmmaking.

While most feature filmmaking includes at least some (and often an extensive amount of) sound that is not shot synchronously, live action film usually maintains the impression of a strong connection between image and sound through incorporating or giving the impression of simultaneous recording. Scott Curtis describes this connection in live action as "an *indexical* sound/image relationship.... Through live-action sync speech, the actors leave their indexical mark on the sound track; there is a necessary connection between sound and image that is missing from cartoons."<sup>122</sup> Many film spectators may assume that live action films generally maintain such a causal connection between the objects now seen on screen and the sound recorded, whereby the image on film directly corresponds to the sound played. Of course directors and sound editors often rerecord sounds, use Foley artists who create sounds independently of filming, and otherwise manipulate sound in ways that isolate it from its original source.

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<sup>122</sup> Scott Curtis, "The Sound of Early Warner Bros. Cartoons," in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 202.

By contrast, media consumers grown beyond early childhood are readily aware that animation involves at the level of production a necessary separation between sound and image. The finished work thus requires the viewers to make a perceptual “connection” between the voice and the visual representations of the characters. The challenge of the viewing situation is not limited to animation, of course, but applies also to (obviously) dubbed films. Perception of the disconnection between the sound of a single particular voice and the body on screen may not arise if dubbing is well–done and the dubbing actor’s voice is not well–known, but audiences may well remain aware of such a separation of sound and image due to a poor mismatch of mouth movements or consciousness that the familiar voice they are hearing did not emanate from the actor on screen. But the potential perceptual assumption that the actor /character is speaking the dialogue heard entirely disappears for animated film: audiences know that no animated character speaks out of his/her/its body directly. Thereby, as I shall demonstrate, theories of voice grounded in associations with body identity cannot explain the impact of voice in animated film narrative.

The elaboration or even exploitation of such known separation has long been a source of humor in animated cartoons like *Duck Amuck* (Warner Brothers, Chuck Jones, 1953), in which Daffy Duck yells and produces the sounds of a rooster and other wild animals. This audible and humorous meta–cinematic play with expectations about film sound reinforces audience recognition of a disconnection between sound and image. In a perhaps more typical example, *Steamboat Willie* (Disney, 1928), Mickey Mouse strikes a cow’s teeth with a mallet like a xylophone, thereby creating music that generates humor both from the absurdity of the source and the mood of the happy, playful music. Christopher P. Lehman argues that this playful style of musical performance arises from African American culture, more specifically that “animators

relied heavily on the minstrelsy tradition for their music....”<sup>123</sup> Both the Disney company and Warner Brothers underscored (and explicitly marketed) the role of music in their early sound cartoons through the names of their series: *Silly Symphonies*, *Merry Melodies*, and *Looney Tunes*. Disney in particular emphasized synchronized sound and movement produced during Disney’s early technical experiments with film sound quite heavily in Mickey Mouse cartoons like *Steamboat Willie*.<sup>124</sup> Disney’s early sound production practices and aesthetic became part of a tradition of strongly synchronized sound and the comic use of sound effects across American animation to an extent that the very term “Mickey Mousing” denotes a firmly (perhaps even excessively) matched sound and image track.<sup>125</sup>

American animation’s long association with comedy and the concomitant limited variations in genre conventions among animated films conventionally made in the United States reinforce the comedic use of sound and the resultant emphasis on a disconnection between sound and image. By contrast, live action productions do not bear associations with a single genre. Certainly, comedic live action films, particularly in the slapstick style of humor, also make use of such humorous disconnections between sound, for example the “boings,” clanks and clangs

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<sup>123</sup> Christopher P. Lehman, *The Colored Cartoon: Black Representation in American Animated Short Films, 1907-1954* (Amherst Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts, 2007). 16.

<sup>124</sup> Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art, and Commerce of Walt Disney* (Chicago, Illinois: Ivan R. Dee Inc., 1968), 124.

<sup>125</sup> Kirsten Moana Thompson, "'Ah Love! Zee Grand Illusion!': Pepe le Pew, Narcissism, and Cats in the Casbah," in *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation*, ed. Kevin S. Sandler (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 242.



accompanying the Three Stooges' antics often have no more connection to an image or action on screen than did Mickey Mouse's cow teeth xylophone.

Many live action dramas contain obviously edited sound tracks with elements that, often by design, draw attention to a separation between the image and sound. Famously, *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly 1952), a musical comedy that takes as its theme and period setting the coming of sound to the American film industry in the late 1920s, includes a sequence of a film within the film marked by the use of unsynchronized sound. In that sequence, projection equipment failure causes the voices and images to appear out of sync, a humorous scene which effectively—and pleasurably for the audience—mocks the vain, imperious female star of the film—within—a film, who is a comedic villain in *Singin' in the Rain*'s narrative. This scene's play upon the trials of early sound production draws attention to sound itself.

More subtly, an example of such sound and image disjunction, occurs in *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) in a sequence in which a woman on stage sings, yet when she collapses, the music and her singing continue without her. The somewhat creepy detachment that results draws the spectator's awareness to the film's construction as well as establishing a dreamlike quality to the sequence. Nonetheless, given the depth and breadth of genres in live action film, occasional explicit references to the film track's construction, as in those examples, scarcely override the spectators' impression of the "naturalized" quality of sound in the live action mode, in contrast to spectator awareness of animation's construction and ultimately the knowledge that the sounds and voices do not emanate from the world depicted on screen. Thus the challenge for the (meta-) theorist is to tease out what implications such acknowledged difference of construction between live action and animation have for the experience of spectatorship. The question for the theorist is whether spectators overcome their consciousness

that the sound effects, voices, and music do not originate with the images to an extent that established theories of live action film can also sufficiently account for workings of sound in animated films.

### Theories of Film Music and Sound Effects

Many film theorists have addressed the importance to film spectators of music and sound effects, with several analysts focusing from psychoanalytic or cognitive approaches particularly on spectator response to film music's power. Claudia Gorbman's 1987 book *Unheard Melodies* stands as one of the earliest attempts to analyze the spectator's experience of film music from a psychoanalytic film theoretical position, while Noël Carroll establishes in his 1988 book *Mystifying Movies* an initial explanation of spectators' cognitive engagement with film music. Carroll's approach to understanding film music as a modifier of the film's emotional expression recurs in subsequent discussions of cognitive perspectives. Since music serves as a crucial component in the experience of watching a film, explications of this phenomenon have unsurprisingly diverged between psychoanalytic and cognitive theories. Cinema theorists working from cultural studies approaches have less frequently dealt with film music but rather focused more on the genre characteristics or meaningful sound tracks.

### *Psychoanalytic Theories of Film Music and Sound Effects*

Formalist analyses of cinematic language conventionally draw distinctions between diegetic and extra diegetic sound, including music. The term "diegetic" refers to music arising

from sources visible in a given film or justified in that filmic world, such as characters performing the music “live,” a compact disc player shown in a shot, or other such devices like a car radio which belong to the story world played out on screen. As defined by contrast, “non” or “extra” diegetic music is not directly anchored to a known source in the world of the narrative, even if the tone of the music may seem correlated to a scene. Thus the music that conventionally plays at or near the beginning of most American feature films as the credits roll and at the end, as well as in many suspenseful or otherwise emotional scenes, is usually of this latter category.

Audiences have long accepted extra diegetic music as an integral element of the filmic text that affects engagement in the screen narrative, even if such music (or sound effects) seems to have no evident direct causal relationship to events visible on screen. Such extra diegetic pieces of musical accompaniment are, in Gorbman’s words, “unheard melodies,” unheard, that is, from the characters’ perspectives. Gorbman focuses on the perceptions of film spectators rather than those of the cinematically imagined characters; She accounts for viewers’ acceptance of extra diegetic film music by pointing out that “Such conventions have a long history, much of which predates the cinema itself.”<sup>126</sup> Gorbman argues that the traditions of live theater music and opera offered a foundation for the integration of music and performance in enacted narratives, which led to the development of comparable practices in cinema. These practices have become so familiar and commonplace that modern spectators do not question the presence of extra diegetic music in situations where none would naturally occur.

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<sup>126</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), 2.

Gorbman further argues that the impact or meanings that arise from film music derive from both music's "purely musical signification" and its integration into the narrative.<sup>127</sup> Gorbman argues that even though extra diegetic music seems narratively less real than diegetic elements, extra diegetic music can still enhance the *emotional* "reality" of the film. The music may, in particular, achieve the effect of suturing the viewer into the space of the characters. As an element in the encompassing world of the film, music begins to work almost hypnotically to lower "the thresholds of belief."<sup>128</sup> Gorbman draws on psychoanalytic understandings of sound's effects to account for spectator response: "According to the psychoanalytic scenario of psychic development, the infant is born into a sort of 'sonorous envelope,' and is as yet unaware of distinctions between self and other, inside–outside the body."<sup>129</sup> The echoes in the sonorous film envelope of infantile experience, she argues, may account for the power and pleasure spectators receive from music. Gorbman goes on to observe that music theorists themselves have understood extradiegetic music workings: "Eisler and Adorno further claim that music had a magical function—as an antidote to the ghostliness of the cinematographic picture. ... [T]hose who viewed music as addressing cinema's 'loss' presaged recent psychoanalytic models of the cinematic experience."<sup>130</sup> Theorists who have sought to grasp the full attraction and psychic engagement that film viewing generates have thus also attended to sound's contributions to the encompassing cinematic experience.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 40.

Building to some extent on Gorbman's theories, Kathryn Kalinak argues that "music...creates a sense of depth for the spectator, and through a kind of transference or slippage between sound and image, the depth created by the sound is transferred to the flat surface of the image."<sup>131</sup> For Kalinak, the effect works as a "bridge" connecting the space of the theater and the world of the film. She considers music as one of many methods of connection that create the sense of temporal and spatial continuity for the audience. Kalinak offers historical examples to illustrate what she means by continuity: "[B]efore continuity editing and the integrated use of close-ups helped to control spectator response, music established shared experience among spectators."<sup>132</sup> Kalinak concludes that music creates a "conduit for meaning" which helps to connect audiences to the screen characters.

Gorbman's and Kalinak's theories both posit an understanding of sound as a part of human experience. For Gorbman the impact of sound begins before birth, and both Gorbman and Kalinak suggests that music invites spectators to believe in the world on screen and become encompassed by it. Especially from Gorbman's most expressly psychoanalytic perspective, film sound and music further develop film's capacity to suture spectators into the narrative and to evoke emotional responses. In parallel developments in film theory, another set of theorists has turned to the arguments and discoveries of cognitive psychology and its approaches to the spectatorial experience.

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<sup>131</sup> Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 44.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

*Cognitive Theories of Music and Sound Effects*

Noël Carroll, who approaches the impact of film sound on spectators' emotional experiences through the lens of cognitive psychology, describes movie music as functioning quite differently than does Gorbman. Carroll calls for understanding how film sound may modify the visual and narrative aspects of the film in a way analogous to a linguistic modifier, that is, as a verb might modify a noun. He argues, "The music possesses certain expressive qualities which are introduced to modify or to characterize onscreen persons, objects, actions and events, scenes and sequences."<sup>133</sup> Carroll sees such modification of a film's various elements (and thereby the expression of emotional qualities of the events depicted on screen) as film music's primary function. Carroll argues that music "may be used to embellish in popular movies...Structurally, modifying music involves the use of movie elements—photography, narrative, dialogue, and synched sound—as *indicators* that fix the reference of a shot, scene or sequence."<sup>134</sup> For Carroll, music thus functions as part of a larger structured experience which enables the spectator to comprehend the emotional tone of a scene. The music thus, for Carroll, essentially communicates to the spectator further information about the film images.

Robert Thomas Baird's analysis of film's capacity to elicit viewer reactions, following on Carroll's theorization of the workings of horror film, moves beyond considering music to analyzing the potentially visceral impact of cinematic sound effects. Baird examines particularly what he terms "the startle effect," a common sound editing technique in the horror film genre. In

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<sup>133</sup> Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 141.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

an essay on the phenomenon that summarizes how such a startle effect might predictably arise, Baird posits three necessary elements: “(1) a character presence, (2) an implied off screen threat, and (3) a disturbing intrusion into the character's immediate space.”<sup>135</sup> Indeed, films often use sound to foster narrative expectations. Baird’s dissertation, “A Cognitive Poetics of the Threat Scene: How Movies Scare Us,” outlines how sound effects may achieve for cinema what the two dimensional visual screen image cannot seem to attain: a kind of perceived spatial third dimension. Baird argues,

Why would even the primitive faculties of the brain confuse film sensations for real ones? Films are composed of visual and auditory stimulus. Film sound, considered from the perspective of sensory perception, is the equivalent of all other "real" sounds. Both are vibrating sound waves. Only subtle differences in the quality of sound and our constant awareness of context help us differentiate between amplified and natural sound.<sup>136</sup>

Sound can simultaneously seem to surround the spectator of a film as if generated from within that screen world, at the same time it exists *as* sound on the same level as other auditory elements in the world of the spectator watching the film.

The layering of the sounds of the film’s diegetic world and the spectator’s world draws the two spaces into a single experience. Baird’s arguments help us grasp how cinematic sound may seem more “real” than images projected onto a screen—and also explains why unexpected

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<sup>135</sup> Robert Baird, "The Startle Effect: Implications for Spectator Cognition and Media Theory," *Film Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 15.

<sup>136</sup> Robert Thomas Baird, “A Cognitive Poetics of the Threat Scene: How Movies Scare Us” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana/ Champaign, 1995), 116-117.

sounds in the screening room like audiences talking loudly can seem so disruptive to the viewing experience. As perceived by the ears of film audiences in the space, both sound sources are equally *present* and *real*. At the same time, the sounds the spectator may be associating with the film playing at that moment, whether music or sound effects—a piano played diegetically, an off screen door creaking, or even a character speaking—may signify differently than sound effects and music or also voice accompanying animated figures and objects. The former sounds are usually realistically correlated (however illusorily) with familiar sound-generating actions of objects and actors filmed live and immediately visible on screen, while sounds accompanying animated film, however real in the screening room, do not link as closely to the animated imagery on screen.

As a point of departure for a comparative analysis, it would seem that especially non-diegetic music would likely function similarly for spectators of the two modes of film. Sound effects and possibly diegetic music, as well as voices in animated film, the latter of which I discuss the second part of the chapter, might by contrast be presumed to evoke different responses from “realistically anchored” comparable sounds in live action film. Yet the comparative case study of *Playtime* and *The Illusionist*, both of which contain an interesting range of cinematic sound techniques, suggests that spectators’ reaction to film sound is not limited by or directly determined by its visual mode. These two films show that the conventions of animation and live action sound can appear across either mode and do.



*Sound Effects, Animation, and Jacques Tati*

Neither the live action *Playtime* nor the cel-animated feature *The Illusionist* adheres to typical sound practices in feature films; most distinctively, neither narrative feature realizes the conventional use of dialogue, for both are almost devoid of human speech. As a result, both sound effects and music become the aural focus rather than language. This emphasis on music (which both films use conventionally) and sound effects (featured in distinctive ways in each) allows for a productive comparison of the two films, even apart from their parallel focus on the figure of Jacques Tati. Theories from both cognitive and psychoanalytic approaches prove apt in explaining the impact of sound effects on spectators of animated as well as live action films, in addition to both theoretical approaches giving a good account of the similar functioning in both modes of sound music.

Tati's *Playtime* emphasizes mise-en-scène, character typology, and incongruous juxtapositions of objects and gestures to such an extent that it arguably resembles drawn animation, including some of its conventional comedic slapstick and sound gags. Monsieur Hulot, as performed by Tati, stumbles around as a bumbling caricature of a man flummoxed by modernity and technological innovations, as in other filmic realizations of the persona. In *Playtime* Hulot ostensibly unintentionally wreaks havoc across an environment that is cinematically replete with visual humor and puns and even the silly playfulness referred to by the title. Indeed, *Playtime* deploys pronounced sound effects to playful results more extensively than does the animated work that pays homage to it and its director.

*Playtime* uses music comically, most notably in the film's closing sequence where the film demonstrates a musical bridge, like those described by Kalinak, in which a traffic circle

mimics a carousel. The brightly colored cars and their circular motion, driving on a roundabout, as well as a woman bobbing up and down on the back of a motorcycle and the illusion of the cars moving up and down (as they are reflected in a window being moved during cleaning) all evoke a merry go round, but it is the carnival–esque music that completes the reference and the pleasure of the scene. At this moment the arguably non–diegetic music makes no direct reference to the events on screen, but rather connects the on–screen action with a familiar referent that equates a modern, traffic–filled life in Paris with a merry–go–round. Kalinak’s argument that music bridges the space seen on film and the experience of sound in the world partly explains *Playtime*’s making a clear connection in this last scene as well as others between the images on screen and the world known and experienced beyond the viewing space. The music in this film shows how it can, as Kalinak asserts, “smooth[...] over the gap between the experiential world and the world of the film.”<sup>137</sup> *Playtime*’s sound demonstrates how a film can effectively undercut expected notions of realistic film sound.

In an interview, Tati explained his emphasis on visual communication over dialogue to relay ideas in his work: [M]y dialogue isn’t important; the visual situation is for me number one. The dialogue is background sound as you hear it when you’re in the street, in Paris or New York—a brouhaha of voices.” Tati also mentions how sound creates a joke in *Playtime*:

In *Playtime*, when Hulot sits in the modern chair, it is a visual effect, but the sound’s as interesting as the shape of the chair: whoooooosh... The time will come when a young director will use sound creatively; you’ll have a very simple image

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<sup>137</sup> Kalinak, *Settling the Score*, 45.

with very little movement, and the sound will add a new dimension, like putting sound in a painting—whooooosh.<sup>138</sup>

The use of the soundtrack in *Playtime*, which is very distinctive from any Hollywood-made sound feature film, somewhat resembles a typical American animated short film in its drawing attention to exaggerated sounds' comedic effects and its reliance on slapstick action and humorous visual gags. Counter to widespread assumptions about the production of live action cinema, Tati recorded *Playtime*'s sound entirely separately from the images, and crafted the entire audio track in post-production.<sup>139</sup>

*Playtime*'s use of sound effects comically serves as part of the larger narrative about a mechanized modern and ultimately confusing world. As the sound in *Playtime* often emphasizes the air conditioning, the peculiar silence of an interior space, and many other mechanical devices, the sound creates a sense of a fabricated space. Yet as Baird describes, sound effects generally help integrate the world of the spectator with the world of the film. Ironically, this film does not try and draw the audience into a natural space, but one that feels pointedly constructed. The film creates an awareness of the falseness of the sounds around Hulot and ultimately in the space of the spectator. This is in contrast to how most films generally try not to draw attention to their manufactured nature. Baird's analysis describes the typical use of sound as part of most films' attempts to draw audience members into a narrative, yet *Playtime*'s portrayal of an artificial modern Paris demonstrates not only how constructed sound effects are, but also how even obviously artificial sounds can shape spectator's viewing experience.

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<sup>138</sup> Jacques Tati, "Tati's Democracy," 36-41.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 37.

In contrast to *Playtime* and many cartoons, *The Illusionist* has no playful “whoosh” or the equivalent, even though the sound track of *The Illusionist*, like the film as a whole, pays homage to Tati’s work through its use of garbled sounds rather than comprehensible dialogue. Instead, its soundtrack, like those of most live action films, draws no attention to itself but rather creates an illusion of a “surrounding” environment –a sonic envelope that supports the film’s quite realistic mood and tone. The *Illusionist*’s compelling use of sound eschews the traditional American animated practice of comedic exaggeration of sound. *The Illusionist* tells a story inspired by Tati’s professional life and his troubled relationship with his daughter.<sup>140</sup> Tati began his career as a mime in the early 1930s before he directed and performed in comedy films such as *Les Vacances de M. Hulot* (*Mr. Hulot’s Holiday*, 1953), *Mon Oncle* (*My Uncle*, 1958), and *Playtime* (1967).<sup>141</sup>

Collaborating with the French production company Pathé, Chomet produced and set *The Illusionist* in Edinburgh, where most of the film is located, even though the original script was set in Prague.<sup>142</sup> The film centers, as its title suggests, on an aging magician who, the director has attested, was inspired by the persona and also physical appearance of the performer Tati himself (more than by his humorous persona Monsieur Hulot).<sup>143</sup> Chomet’s illusionist stumbles about in

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<sup>140</sup> Richard McDonald, letter to Roger Ebert, “The Private Torment behind Tati’s ‘The Illusionist,’” *Chicago Sun Times* website, January 12, 2011, accessed September 30, 2012, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100602/LETTERS/100609998>.

<sup>141</sup> David Bellos, *Jacques Tati* (London: Random House, 2011), 47.

<sup>142</sup> Dave Kehr, “Conjuring Tati’s Spirit with Animation,” *New York Times* (New York), October 29, 2010.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

an almost clumsy dance that seems charming and also invites sympathy for his somewhat inept interactions with the world. The illusionist's disgruntled pet rabbit, a companion through much of the film, makes quiet grumbles, chirps, and odd snapping sounds. As the film opens, the illusionist's career is in decline as rock music and other types of entertainment are becoming more popular in the 1960s. When he manages to find work performing for a few days in a backwater town, an unexpected relationship that arises with a naïve and admiring orphaned girl apparently in her early teens provides initially gratifying distraction from his professional and financial struggles, as she quickly becomes a kind of substitute daughter. But soon the new responsibilities he feels for the young woman exacerbate the pressures on him. While he tries to live up to her expectations, he cannot make enough money to support her love of pretty things as well as basics for himself and so eventually leaves her behind to a young suitor.

Due to its very sparse use of dialogue, similar in that way to Chomet's 2003 *Triplets of Belleville*, the quite melancholic film develops its story largely from the "performance" of the animated characters and from the *mise-en-scène*. The generally indecipherable voices that spectators hear in the film create ambient and atmospheric sounds, making even those work as sound effects rather than as spoken language. In its structure, the soundtrack closely resembles most of Tati's films, but most notably *Playtime*. Tati himself described the speech and voices that appear in that film specifically as background.<sup>144</sup> In both films under study, music and sound effects communicate much of the tone and mood of the narratives.

Yet, *The Illusionist*'s quiet ambient noises do still encourage a sense of realism, as we can see following Gorbman, for they subtly envelop the audience in the space and distract from

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<sup>144</sup> Jacques Tati, cited in Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Film Comment*, "Tati's Democracy: An Interview and Introduction," *Film Comment* 9.3 (May-June 1973): 36-41.

the artificiality of animation. The subtle nature of sound works in *The Illusionist* much as Claudia Gorbman's analysis suggests it works to generate through the film an encompassing world that, despite its two dimensional appearance, surrounds the spectator. The film begins with applause and the screech of microphone feedback just before a voice introduces the film *The Illusionist*, as if a film within the film were beginning. The mechanical projector noises continue before the announcer asserts that due to a "technical glitch" the film will not begin, so he then welcomes back the magician. The nameless illusionist comes on stage and performs in front of the curtains that had not retracted to reveal the film screen. This presentation of the film within a film (which never begins) even while creating a metacinematic expectation paradoxically implies that the spectators of *The Illusionist* as a film have become audience members for a "live" illusionist's performance.

The opening sounds create a bridge, as it often does across edits, between the world in which we live and the world on screen, as Kalinak argues. The sound effects generate allusions and thereby establish what Kalinak analyzes as transference or slipping between the real world experience of a theater or viewing context and the film event. The narrative's sound track embeds the audience in the experience of both live and film theater, and in equivalent ways. By evoking real world experiences of theatrical fictional narratives, the animated film draws the spectator's attention away from its own artificiality and towards the transference of these lived experiences into the film experience.

Music as well as sound effects occur in *The Illusionist*'s opening scene, which set up layers of performance which become the core subject of the film. These layers reinforce the sense of space that Gorbman discusses as an effect of sound's influence on the spectator. Playing cards the illusionist displays noisily flutter to the ground and the illusionist's footsteps thump on

the wooden stage, against a continuing sound of mechanical hammering noises. The music seems diegetic as if coming from a single piano, presumably played by a pianist backstage for the benefit of the illusionist's performance. These noises, while somewhat comical, have an incidental quality in their almost mundane presence maintaining the feeling of the space. The mechanical noises seem humorous as they indicate that the theater is small and ill-equipped, but they also create layers of spatial depth for the location by implying an unseen backstage and also off-screen characters. This film's sound effects helps establish the space, for, as Gorbman argues, the soundtrack here "compensates for the flatness of the screen."<sup>145</sup> The soundtrack's capacity to create illusions of depth seems all the more important as an effect on spectators, because the hand drawn images in this film do not attain the visual depth of the live action cinematography which Gorbman described.

In much the same way as the psychoanalytic approaches reveal, the sound effects in *The Illusionist* also provide information that for Noël Carroll's cognitive approach implies a modification of the audience's understanding of characters. An example is the illusionist's rabbit. The sounds provide much of the spectator's knowledge of how angry the rabbit is and thereby creates comic relief for the story, as spectators typically expect rabbits to be sweet and fuzzy, based on conventions especially of Disney animation. In this film, the rabbit bites and snaps rebelliously. The noises, however, sound both comical in conveying an anthropomorphized rabbit's frustration and subtle in their understatement and brevity. The rabbit's noises do not exaggerate or overemphasize the creature's actions for purely comedic effect as would likely occur in a Mickey Mouse cartoon, yet they do modify the spectator's experience of the rabbit as Noël Carroll describes. These sound effects thereby fill out and elaborate the distinctive

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<sup>145</sup> Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 53.

character of the rabbit for the audience. In keeping with Carroll's understanding of how sound can work like a verb describing a noun, the rabbit's utterances reveal the rabbit's anger as its key characteristic.

The significance of Carroll's discussion of sound extends to *The Illusionist* in the ways that music sets the mood, evokes a time period and place, and provides sound in what would otherwise be perhaps unsettling or empty—feeling silent moments. Except for a few brief scenes in which characters play music on stage or we see a jukebox in a bar, the music in *The Illusionist* is largely extra diegetic. As Carroll argues, the music serves to provide information to the spectator and to modify the events on screen. Further, as Carroll suggests in positing that film music works like language, *The Illusionist* uses music as a joke. Humor develops from the music as a presumably rock and roll style song sounds like nothing so much as unintelligible unpleasant yelling by the lead singer. While most of the dialogue in the film also consists of similar kinds of indistinct noises, this yelling seems to be making the joke that rock and roll is all but indecipherable

Following Carroll, we can understand the music as modifying the viewer's impression of the singers: showing them to be incomprehensible, but also unremarkable musicians. Their abrasive sound contrasts with the melancholic tone of the film's music otherwise, making it thereby even more discordant with the overall tone of the film and also from the illusionist himself. Carroll's point that the music serves "as *indicators* that fix the reference of a shot, scene or sequence," pertains here in making sure that the spectator discerns how much these musicians differ from the rather gloomy illusionist in both temperament and age.<sup>146</sup> The humor of the musician's incomprehensible singing does not draw attention to the sound as disconnected from

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<sup>146</sup> Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image*, 141.



the images, however, the drawn image of the young rock star visually conveys an exaggerated overdramatic version of rock stars that closely mirrors the playful overdramatic mumbling music. As Carroll's theory of sound argues, but with explicit reference only to examples from live action films, the music here cues spectators what to feel about the characters. Even in this somewhat humorous, satiric use of it, *The Illusionist*'s music maintains a subtlety that can be contrasted with *Playtime*'s more artificial use of music as the film more explicitly mocks the artificiality of the modern world.

Indeed, the somber tone and melancholy movements of the sound effects in the animated *The Illusionist* create an acoustic space that seems more "natural" and less manipulated or constructed than in the more meta-cinematic *Playtime*, for *The Illusionist* sound track does not draw attention to itself as do the audial jokes in *Playtime*. Thereby, following Baird's argument, filmgoers perceive sound waves identically, whether they emanate from the film projection equipment or from other sources within the cinema-viewing space. *The Illusionist*'s use of sound helps construct the filmic space as perceptually *real*, for as I noted in the introduction, the "real" that I use here can be understood from Raymond Williams' *Keywords* where he describes this understanding of real as "practices of... filmmaking..." that have become understood to seem like the real world.<sup>147</sup> Throughout this dissertation, "real" generally refers to seeming perceptually like live action. This effect of seeming *real* operates in ways that reinforce the discussion in Chapter Two of how these films construct a *real* that does not always reference the entire world, but specifically alludes to either emotionally or nostalgically *real* parts of our experience of the world.

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<sup>147</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Society and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) 258.

Both psychoanalytic and cognitive theories help account for the impact on spectators of the sometimes atypical use of sound in the two films. In both, sound does variously envelop the audience. Gorbman and Kalinak outline how sound effects and music encourage a sense of realism and how they create a bridge to the spectators as demonstrated by the films. Similarly, for Carroll and Baird, the films reveal how sound can disrupt conventional expectations of sound to create a sense of realism. In sum I conclude with reference to sound effects and music in film that the theories of sound operate the same way for live action and animation when the sounds are not specifically connected with a body. As I discuss in the next section, such connection to an individual person through voice complicates the applicability of the theories in ways that nonverbal sound effects do not.

#### Theories of Voice as a Facet of Spectatorship

The human voice is one of the most significant components of film sound, for it carries with it not only the power of language to communicate, but also all of the social, cultural, and linguistic implications that exist in enunciated speech. Along with the vocabulary and grammatical structure of a given language, how a performer enunciates or sings in that language expresses facets of the speaker's social inscription through tone, accent, and pitch. These particularities of performance can communicate a character's gender, social class, geographical origins, and culturally-defined racial identities, or at minimum that character's ability to mimic those traits often associated with voice.

Theories of the voice in cinema grounded in psychoanalytic approaches as elaborated by scholars like Michel Chion and Kaja Silverman and cultural theories of stars developed by

Richard Dyer and Alexander Doty, among others, have proposed analyses of how voice performances in live action film contribute to generating sound cinema's spectatorial impact and capacity to communicate meaning. Such theories, I attest, can also help account for the divergent impact of voice tracks for animated films when films get dubbed into different languages, depending on whether spectators know the new voice actors and which star images their voices communicate. Two examples are the documented different impact of the Mushu character when *Mulan* was dubbed into Mandarin, thus replacing Eddie Murphy's distinctive English language voice performance, and the different experiences of mono-English speaking audiences when they hear the voices in *Howl's Moving Castle* that are spoken by unknown actors in Japanese or by known American actors like Billy Crystal, in English.

I argue in this section that the pertinence of Chion's and Silverman's psychoanalytically-grounded theories is limited to its explaining the impact of voice in close association with live action performers on screen. That is, the absence of the voices' connections to photographed human bodies limits the effectiveness of those theories to animated sound films. By contrast, both Dyer's and Doty's cultural studies based analyses of the significance of known performers in viewers' "reading" a film posit individuated and self-aware adult spectators who can equally well discern semiotically and culturally specific markers of race and gender in animated characters and their voices as in live action film. However, even self-aware spectators cannot as readily recognize animation characters' connections to voice performers. I thus explore further theorizing the workings of race and gender in animation of socially inflected voices by performers whose names audiences may recognize, yet who function arguably as "animation voice stars," separate, in contrast to conventional live action "star studies," from any association with a physical body or even demeanor assuredly known beyond the film. A point I argue in the

balance of this chapter is that while scholars have developed cognitive approaches to music and sound in film, none have to date addressed the workings of voice from such approaches, neither for live action or animation.

### *Psychoanalytic Theories of Voice and Spectatorship*

Michel Chion's *The Voice in Cinema*, originally published in French in 1984, addresses the power and importance of the voice to film audiences. As a part of his discussion of the psychoanalytic significance of voice for spectatorship, Chion argues the importance of what he calls vococentrism. He contends specifically, "In actual movies, for real spectators, there are not *all the sounds including the human voice. There are voices and then everything else.* In other words, in every audio mix, the presence of a human voice instantly sets up a hierarchy of perception."<sup>148</sup> Chion argues cogently that live action film viewers immediately notice and attend to the sound of human voices over all others. His analysis separates the specific audible voice from speech and or even language itself, and clarifies his view that the enunciated voice is an instrument of communication unto itself.

Chion also analyzes film's capacity to create a connection between the voice heard and the body seen on screen in real time, including that body's physical appearance and distance from the camera. Addressing the importance for film viewers of voices being synchronized with bodies, Chion argues, "We take this temporal co-incidence of words and lips as a sort of guarantee that we're in the real world, where hearing and sound usually coincides with seeing its

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<sup>148</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 5.

source....”<sup>149</sup> Chion finds, however, that the importance of exact synchronization varies, depending on the type of film and viewing circumstances and cultures. He notes specifically that American and French film viewers seem “obsessively concerned with synchronization that has no detectable ‘seams’” which is difficult in live action dubbed films.<sup>150</sup> His analysis of the connections between image and sound leads Chion to a discussion of directorial choices that deliberately manipulate audience expectations. He thus addresses the incongruity experienced in hearing a voice that seems inappropriately dubbed onto a body. He uses the example of the “hoarse and vulgar voice” coming from the young female character in *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973).<sup>151</sup> That example illustrates the spectatorial expectation of a congruous or compatible voice and image in live action film. My case study analysis of *Mulan* below demonstrates the relevance for animations to Chion’s analysis of the “connections” viewers make between voices and bodies.

More explicitly Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches such as those developed by feminist film theorist Kaja Silverman prove less useful, in that Silverman posits that the voice is intrinsically gendered. Silverman asserts at the outset of her 1988 work *The Acoustic Mirror* that “Hollywood requires the female voice to assume similar responsibilities to those it confers upon the female body.”<sup>152</sup> For Silverman both the voice and body in film work as a fetish, which, she

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 128-129.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>152</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press), 38.

argues, “fill[s] in for and cover[s] over what is unspeakable within male subjectivity.”<sup>153</sup> For Silverman, the female body and voice together retain a consistently fetishized position in film and are much more strongly connected than the cinematic male voice and body. She argues that “the rule of synchronization simultaneously holds more fully and necessitates more coercion with the female than with the male voice.”<sup>154</sup> This analysis assumes a certainty of the characters having a singular and discernible gender.

Silverman discusses Lina (Jean Hagen) in the 1952 *Singin' in the Rain* as a woman whose voice does not match her body, and who thus fails to maintain her star status in transition to sound film. As Lina's voice does not get recorded, another voice, that of Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds), becomes attached to Lina's body. The film posits the importance of the alignment between the female body and the seemingly correct voice through their mismatch in Lina's comedic character. Silverman also introduces and elaborates on the theory of the “sonorous envelope” of the maternal voice, as a sound enveloping the infant, to argue that such understanding of the envelopment of the child/ spectator can imply entrapment as well as, or instead of, a bliss of plenitude.

Silverman's discussion of how filmmakers structure voice, like the visual body, in gendered ways, seems to assume that film voices will have the presence of clear vocal gender traits. The assumption is problematic for a number of reasons, but certainly animation does not necessarily adhere to self-evident gender traits or clearly gendered bodies, although it typically does. Also problematic is Silverman's apparent assumption that such an unquestionable impact of vocally marked engendering will have a specific or predictable impact on spectators'

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 46.

relationships to characters. In sum, Silverman's theories of voice often pertain to animation, when it conforms to traditional Hollywood standards of gendered characters. However, her theories cannot easily pertain to all animation without being rethought and developed. In contrast, Chion's discussion of voices appropriately matching characters still functions for animated characters' visual representation, but only if the visual representation does create a particular expectation of gender or sex.

### *Cultural and Star Studies Theories of Voice*

Silverman's psychoanalytic studies of film voice focus primarily on that aural element's capacity to communicate gender and power relationships in a film narrative and assume an embodied voice. Cultural studies approaches to cinematic analysis also frequently consider the impact of gendered voice, but frame the filmic character relations to the spectators of the film differently. Most crucially, these theoretical approaches extend to considering gender as exceeding a binary frame, as relevant to approaching the animated figure of the Reluctant Dragon in the Disney film discussed in Chapter Three. Star studies, a cultural studies approach focused on the contextual functions and meanings of media actors who have attained celebrity status, attend particularly to the impact of extra diegetic contexts on film spectatorship. Star studies approaches examine the social and cultural contexts and implications of a star's known persona and biography in conjunction with that performer's work in films. Stars, while more obviously visibly influential through their performances in live action cinema and its promotion, do carry some of their celebrity into the voice performances of some of the characters in animation as well as to some extent those film's marketing, as I argue below.

Richard Dyer and Alex Doty have expressly analyzed characters from cultural studies perspectives in relation to figures signifying gender and, for Dyer in particular, race. Dyer argues in his 1986 book *Heavenly Bodies* that a star figure signifies a complex sign of gender and race in the society in which it circulates. For Dyer, “The star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars. A film star’s image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio hand-outs, as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star’s doings and ‘private’ life.”<sup>155</sup> The star figure thus incorporates many strands of representation that may structure a film spectator’s reception of that recognizable star image.

Dyer takes Paul Robeson’s embodiment of African American masculinity as a primary element of his star persona. Dyer argues that Robeson’s roles and public persona (which certainly centrally involved his voice) worked to communicate an ideal of the African American man as simultaneously powerful and controlled. As an example of the implications of a spectator’s perspective, Dyer argues that Robeson’s image could communicate restraint and containment for white audiences, while simultaneously suggesting to African American audiences a wealth of potential for effective resistance or subversion of authority.<sup>156</sup> These different views of Robeson and his image demonstrate for Dyer how spectators can differently internalize and reinterpret the meanings created by star images. Dyer’s analysis makes clear how the recognizable voices of Robeson and also Garland contributed to building those stars’ cultural meanings, through signifying—also in recordings, separate from visual representations—distinctive personal qualities and traits within a frame of gendered and raced sexuality.

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<sup>155</sup> Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 2.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.



The influence of stars on the reception of a work or a particular character speaks to the multimedia experience of a film and the way that distribution companies advertise using stars and cast films with star power in mind. Dyer points out, “What the audience makes of all this is something else again... Audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions, that work for them.”<sup>157</sup> By casting well-known actors as voices in their films, producers of animated features like the Disney Company seek out and invest in, and then explicitly promote, performers whose fame and celebrity will attract the largest possible audiences. That attraction derives from the spectators’ familiarity with the people behind the voices. Although spectators do not always recognize voice actors and stars in animated films, many viewers within a given culture do usually recognize stars. For example, Robin Williams was readily familiar to American audiences in his performance as the Genie in *Aladdin* (Disney 1992). That recognition demonstrates spectator awareness of celebrity in animation and ultimately the recognized race and gender of those celebrities influence the animated characters. While expressly related to understanding live action actors who appear in film, Dyer’s work creates a definition of stars that does pertain to animation.

Besides considering how marks of race and gender are borne by familiar, even iconic actors into a given film performance, Dyer also addresses spectator awareness of character sexuality. One chapter of *Heavenly Bodies* focuses on Judy Garland as a gay icon that embodies sensibilities which Dyer argues established her persona as a sympathetic and resilient figure. Garland’s known personal struggles, her range of film roles, and her musical performances combined to create an image that, Dyer documents, many gay men have found especially

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 5.

appealing. Dyer describes how especially as Garland aged, her voice seemed to gain appeal among gay men for its suggesting how she clearly struggled yet persevered to reach and hold notes. Dyer finds parallels to the validation particularly of Garland's voice as a symbol of perseverance and resilience, to the similar ways that Paul Robeson's image stood for many African American audiences for a racially framed valorous masculinity under duress.

Alexander Doty, in scholarship focusing on gender representations and performances that challenge heterosexist assumptions, argues that gay audiences themselves can "queer" films through their extra textual knowledge and awareness of the sexual and gender identity of stars, directors, and other contributors to image making. As noted in Chapter One, Doty argues the necessity of incorporating such consciousness into an understanding of spectatorship. Doty observes that "[b]iographical information about directors (and stars, writers, etc.) and spectators often becomes crucial to examining queer authorship," for spectators actively seek information about performers who do or might identify as queer.<sup>158</sup>

Doty specifically addresses the importance of voices in Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho*, in which the cross-dressing Norman Bates speaks for himself and as his mother. Doty explains in a footnote that the mother's voice was actually created from the performances of a gay man and two straight women.<sup>159</sup> This performance of a voice that spectators are led to believe is that of the mother and performed by one speaker, becomes ultimately attributed to Norman, and yet was performed by multiple actors. This confusing representation undermines the expectation that

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<sup>158</sup> Alex Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 26.

<sup>159</sup> Alexander Doty, *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

spectators can reliably recognize gender in any voice. A theory that takes as its premise an alert, contextually-integrated spectator drawing on knowledge of a voice source beyond the immediate film could both be undermined by an obscured star image, and yet for some spectators may create an opportunity for especially alert fandom's understanding animated film differently. Such level of awareness reinforces Doty's argument for considering different kinds of spectators separately. For example, if the performer of an animated character's voice is publically known to be gay like Jane Lynch in *Wreck-it Ralph*, audiences may understand references to or discussion of that particular character's sexuality from within a framework of such extra textual knowledge.

Analyzing voice in popular culture from another perspective, Jacob Smith argues that vocal performance and tradition can indicate or suggest the race of a performer. His chapter exploring the timbre of vocal performances gives as example Enrico Caruso's bel canto contrasted to Louis Armstrong's "rasp."<sup>160</sup> Smith's cultural studies argument focuses on singing, but addresses how vocal performances communicated race as a result of the performers and the varied vocal traditions. He concludes how "...despite being only one style utilized by African American performers, a raspy tone took on heightened meaning as an index of blackness in relation to the bel canto tradition of vocal training."<sup>161</sup> For Smith, Armstrong's vocal inflections, timbre, and style create assumptions of race, although Armstrong does not imply that raspy singing always or even clearly indicates race, but rather that it evokes the "structural and

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<sup>160</sup> Jacob Smith, *Vocal Tracks: Performance and Sound Media* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 115.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

emotional pressures that produce ‘blackness’ as a cultural commodity.”<sup>162</sup> This awareness of “blackness” arises from the voices of the performers as well as media history.

To test the efficacy of these theories for analyzing animation, I will consider them in relation to two animated features *Mulan* and *Howl’s Moving Castle*. My analysis reveals that some theories like Chion’s translate readily to the mode of animation, even though the implications of the theory may be altered in relation to animation. In contrast, psychoanalytic theories of voice grounded in an understanding of gendered bodies and voices, such as those that characterize classical Hollywood cinema, do not bear out in analyzing spectatorial relations to many animated characters.

*Ethnically/ Culturally Marked Voices in Mulan and Howl’s Moving Castle*

*Mulan* and *Howl’s Moving Castle* invite comparative analysis of the workings of voice in animated film with reference to established theories. Both animated features have narratives derived from cross-cultural sources and both were widely distributed internationally. *Mulan* and *Howl’s Moving Castle* likewise received international release to audiences that did not master or even experience the film in the original language (but rather with dubbing or subtitles). The seeming ease of these films’ dubbing into other languages raises issues of animation’s differences from live action film, whereas live action films often run into greater problems of making the mouths seem to match the words of another language.

Disney’s 1998 feature *Mulan* offers a productive test of cinematic theories of voice animation. That it has a transcultural narrative and was made and distributed transnationally,

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

including its dubbing in multiple languages, suggests that voice actors have a key role to play in influencing animated character reception. Disney's *Mulan* is of particular interest as a retelling of a Chinese folktale interpreted in the Disney animation style for American audiences, yet still ostensibly set in China. Its voice casting, aspect of cultural translation, and characterizations of Chinese men and women and Chinese-associated animal figures raise questions of spectator address which bring racial and especially gendered images into relief. *Mulan* retells an ancient Chinese ballad as a classic Disney musical in the vein of *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), incorporating a Hollywood style romance, a comic relief sidekick, and a particularly American emphasis on individualism. Multiple filmic adaptations of the Chinese tale had been made before Disney's *Mulan* was released in 1998, including live action versions made in China and Hong Kong between 1927 and 1964. Following upon Disney's announcement of its planned production, several other more cheaply animated versions which were quickly made in 1998 (and subsequently) in a range of locales, released straight to video.<sup>163</sup>

*Mulan* establishes a central character named Fa Mulan (the Cantonese version of the Mandarin Chinese name "Hua Mulan" that appears in some literary texts and films), as a young woman reluctantly preparing to be married through a matchmaker. That figure, who is not actually Chinese either historically or culturally, functions to illustrate an American notion of a

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<sup>163</sup> The Chinese and Hong Kong versions appeared in 1927, 1942, 1964, 2005, and 2009; a version from the Netherlands in 1998; a version from Australia in 1998 and another animated American version in 1998, which went straight to video.

patriarchal historical China.<sup>164</sup> Representatives from the army come to enlist Mulan's aging father, a seasoned military man, into the Emperors' service, inspiring the daughter (there being no son) to dress as a man to replace him. In an unthinkable unfilial act for the Chinese historical context and quite a different narrative from the original tale, Mulan even takes her father's sword and sneaks away at night. Mulan trains and fights disguised as a man, but after an injury leads to the revelation of her gender, her commander Shang dismisses her from the army after deciding to spare her from execution for the ruse. Together with a guardian dragon Mushu (voiced by Eddie Murphy), her steed Khan, and a pet cricket, Mulan proceeds to the capital city and helps to save the emperor and all of China from the "Huns." Soon after Mulan returns home and reconciles with her father, her former superior officer Captain Li Shang arrives, presumably to court her in an old-fashioned American way to become his wife.

Disney's *Mulan* includes many ostensibly Chinese human characters and animals, primarily, besides the lizard-like little dragon, the cricket and horse. However, the Disney animated version of *Mulan* also involves an interesting cast of voice actors whose performances generate much of the film's distinctive racial and gendered representations. B. D. Wong performs the speaking voice of Shang while Donny Osmond performs all of Li Shang's singing. Similarly, Macau-born American actress Ming-Na Wen performs the speaking voice of Mulan while Lea Salonga performs the same character's singing voice. The divergences between Shang and Mulan's singing and speaking voices demonstrate how convincingly character voices can be cast and recast in animation. However, as Audrey Hepburn's Eliza Doolittle (whose singing

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<sup>164</sup> Jun Tang, "A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Production and Reception of Disney's *Mulan* Through its Chinese Subtitles," *European Journal of English Studies* 12, no. 2 (August 2008): 149-162.

voice is performed by Marni Nixon in 1964s *My Fair Lady*) demonstrates, live action can also mask the use of multiple voices for a single character. Other voice actors in *Mulan* familiar to some American audiences include Eddie Murphy, a typically comedic African American actor, who performs the comic sidekick Mushu, and the “effeminate gay” Harvey Fierstein as the soldier Yao.

As a contrast to *Mulan*, which was an American made film sent overseas, *Howl's Moving Castle* offers an instance of foreign (Japanese animated) film which was marketed and released in America. The two films both demonstrate the possible workings of psychoanalytic and cultural studies theories as they pertain to analyzing voice workings of animated films across translations. In *Howl's Moving Castle*, the star performances in different languages, as well as the varied actors performing in the altered versions, allow for new interpretations of the film that pivot on the voices of the actors. Both the physical ties to a represented body, as described by Silverman and the implications based on the star images as described by Dyer shift with the dubbing and recasting of the film.

*Howl's Moving Castle*, produced by Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli, is based on British author Diana Wynne Jones' book, also entitled *Howl's Moving Castle*.<sup>165</sup> Published as a young adult novel in 1986, it is set in an imaginary magical land of Ingary. The film tells the story of a young hat maker Sophie (voiced in the English version by Emily Mortimer) transformed into an old woman (Jean Simmons) by the Witch of the Waste (Lauren Bacall)<sup>166</sup>. Sophie embarks on a

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<sup>165</sup> Studio Ghibli is also known for *Castle in the Sky* (1986), *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), *Spirited Away* (2001), and *Ponyo* (2008) among others.

<sup>166</sup> These two characters are voiced by Chieko Baishô (Sophi) and Akihiro Miwa (The Witch of the Waste) in the Japanese version.

great adventure to find the powerful wizard Howl (voiced in English by Christian Bale) so that he can restore her youth.<sup>167</sup> She finds his walking mechanical castle in the waste lands, and becomes his housekeeper. While working in the castle, she befriends Howl's fire demon Calcifer (voiced by Billy Crystal), and his assistant Markl (Josh Hutcherson).<sup>168</sup> The American version of the film features well-known performers, as noted above, perhaps helping to establish a familiarity with these new characters. A war between two nations begins as Howl, despite his pacifist instincts, decides to fight to protect the common people. He becomes endangered by the use of his magic as it threatens to overcome him and permanently transform him into a monster. Sophie falls in love with Howl, despite her initial old age curse that slowly fades, and works to save Howl from his own efforts and ultimately return his heart that had been held captive by Calcifer.

The consideration of the two films from psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches reveals interesting issues in the films themselves, but more pointedly demonstrates which of the theories pertain to animation with only slight alterations, and which theories become unmanageable or irreconcilable to the workings of voices in animation. Analyzing voice performances particularly in *Mulan* tests the theories of voice in film laid out above. Chion's understanding of the importance in spectator expectations of the connections between the visual and the aural becomes complicated due to animation's use of voices with more abstracted figures like fire.

Drawing examples from among French and American films, Chion analyzes the spectator's process of "nailing-down" the voice tightly to the visual body, particularly the

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<sup>167</sup> A pop singer, Takuya Kimura, voices Howl in the Japanese film.

<sup>168</sup> Tatsuya Gashûin voices Calcifer and Ryûnosuke Kamiki voices Markl in the Japanese version



mouth. Although he does not discuss animated figures, the point remains relevant in considering the power of connection between image and sound, as discussed in the first half of the chapter, with the additional expectations of a voice as tied to a (presumably speaking, though animated) body.<sup>169</sup> For Chion such connections between voice and image must match the timing and movement of the mouth and also the type of character in dubbed films. While not dubbed for a live figure or voiced over for effect such as in *The Exorcist*, the voice casting of *Mulan*'s main characters clearly aims to underscore expectations of racialized and gender congruence between many of the human figures that spectators see and hear in the film. For example, the drawn image of Mulan appears to be based somewhat on the speaking voice actress, as a juxtaposition of her photograph and the film figure reveals. The resemblance between the voice actor and the animated character has occurred in many other films, like Danny DeVito's performance of Philoctetes in Disney's 1997 *Hercules* or Tom Hanks as Woody in Pixar's 1995 *Toy Story* and its sequels. Both Mulan's and Shang's speaking voices carry a subtle Asian intonation that may come from the actors having spoken some Chinese before or alongside learning English or a general exposure to the more tonal languages. That is, Ming-Na Wen and B.D. Wong both speak with what could almost be called Asian-influenced accents; they seem to sound more "Asian" than many other American actors, certainly including Mulan's fellow soldier Yao (voiced by Harvey Fierstein) and the dragon Mushu (voiced by Eddie Murphy).

The innate disconnection for animated films between voices and bodies also limits the usefulness of Kaja Silverman's theories of voice in its focus on the implications for gendered characters. The capacity of animated characters to be visually genderless, like in McLaren's 1940 *Dots*, complicates any analyses that assume obvious gender awareness. Similarly, the lack

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<sup>169</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 130.

of any biological sex in animated characters complicates the gender binary present in Silverman's assertions. Silverman's discussion of voice as gendered pertains inconsistently to animation, to the extent to which drawn characters are somehow gendered (as most seem to be), for such gender is neither grounded in any biological existence of sexual or gender identity nor necessarily linked to any clearly gendered voice actors.

*Mulan* demonstrates some issues which Silverman's assertions about gender can elucidate, as the film contains both gender crossing jokes and a cross gender performance that does not quite succeed in persuading the audience. Strongly gendered language recurs throughout the film, ultimately reaffirming the gender roles that Mulan's cross dressing rebels against. Kaja Silverman argues that the position of a woman in film remains the same for both the body and the voice. For the animated Mulan, this theory would entail that despite Mulan's cross dressing, she never fully achieves the narrative position of a man because her voice always remains a woman's voice. Yet Mulan does in some moments engage in a "male position" despite her feminine voice.

Once Mulan cuts her hair and dons masculine attire, the character appears visually as male (to other human characters within the diegesis) in cross gender performance even though she only for brief moments attempts to speak in a lower register. It is also in those moments that the male impersonation seems more artificial. That is, the character always registers as female for audiences through the voice, even while the narrative pretends she seems male to the other characters. On her first day of training while dressed as a man, Mulan watches Shang approach shirtless and seems emboldened by her male persona to gaze at and sexually objectify Shang, even as she (as a male) tries to speak in a lower voice to talk to him. The character's voice remains a woman's— for a brief time sounding like a woman's trying unsuccessfully to sound

like a man's—even as Mulan lays claim to “the male gaze.” Thus the still-female-gendered voice does not bind her to a conventional female position while she enacts a masculine persona visually. The animated character's performance there, in relation to voice, calls Silverman's argument about the voice's ability to position the figure into question. Mulan's agency continues through the film as she fires rockets, saves Shang from an avalanche, and ultimately rescues the emperor. Mulan maintains both agency and identity through her voice, even as the enacted animated masculine marked body allows her to become soldier and man.

Details about representations in *Mulan*, particularly of Mushu, make clearer the relevance of Dyer's theories for explicating spectatorship of animated film. Some of the humor that the character generates arises from the incongruity of voice and the associated star image of Eddie Murphy, who later voiced the markedly similar Donkey in DreamWorks' 2001 *Shrek*. The figure of Mushu appears as a hapless little Chinese red dragon acting like a rather incompetent “coon” type, who then, trying to assert his masculinity, tries to present himself as a bombastic black preacher.<sup>170</sup> It is Murphy's intonation, accent, tone, and ultimately his recognizable voice that generates such characterizations. Murphy's somewhat stereotyped African American persona ultimately attaches such implications to Mushu in *Mulan*.

Early in the film upon first introduction to the character Mulan, Mushu announces in a strong deep voice that “[I say to] anybody who is foolish enough to threaten our family... Vengeance will be *Mine!*” Murphy makes the loud declaration—which approximates the dialogue of a stereotypical “kung fu” film hero like Bruce Lee—in the voice of a traditional black preacher. Visually, the Mushu figure appears at that moment as a skinny two-legged lizard-like dragon attempting to humorous effect to appear through shadow play much more threatening

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<sup>170</sup> Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 7.

than he is, yet at the outset the other guardian spirits mock and generally cast him as a figure of comic relief. In this “star turn” near the beginning of the film, when he performs with his voice a Bruce Lee *cum* Pentecostal black preacher composite, Murphy establishes the over-the-top persona Mushu will have for the rest of the film. Murphy’s previous roles in the *Beverly Hills Cop* films as directed by Martin Brest (1984), Tony Scott (1987) and John Landis (1994) and *48 Hrs.* directed by Walter Hill in 1982 were similarly boisterously loud humorous figures personifying uncontrolled excess, one of Murphy’s star characteristics.

Despite being an entirely imaginary being –not even an animal, although drawn somewhat like a pleasant-looking lizard –Mushu displays very clear and specific gender and racial characteristics. Mushu performs an African American male character even as the animation film visually masks –as the “toons” in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, –overt racial characterization. Addressing musical styles, Jacob Smith’s cultural studies approaches emphasize that vocal traditions and practices and related cultural conventions have developed racial associations and even come to evoke certain racial stereotypes. The little dragon’s patterns of speech that variously evoke a coon sidekick stereotype, a fervent Pentecostal preacher, and characters that Murphy has enacted in other films work together to encode Mushu is an African American male character.

Mushu’s character visually resembles the decorative red or black dragons familiar from the décor of Chinese restaurants in the United States, and also bears a name with American restaurant associations: Mushu is pronounced just like “Moo Shu,” a Chinese pork dish often seen on American Chinese restaurant menus. Mushu’s name, like many of the film’s representations of Chinese culture, derives from popular (and simplistic) American notions of Chinese culture, which points to the film’s primary audience being American. The voices and

language of these characters also serve to accommodate American audiences through humor, language, and an American notion of what Chinese means.

Dyer's and Doty's theories about how stars encode—and spectators have agency to interpret as a cumulative sign—such extra textual material depends on the audience's recognition of the actors voicing the characters. Dyer's account of the power of stars to express a composite image in their performances entails audience recognition of the star as well as the star's own capacity, for animation, to express his or her star persona in unseen vocal performance. Murphy communicates his widely-recognized exuberant personality through the dragon's quick funny lines, whose speech bears intonations and cadence that are recognizably Murphy's. His performance, clearly culturally encoded as raced and gendered, bolsters the character's familiarity as a type, however covertly: Murphy enacts Mushu as yet another African American comic sidekick.

Animation both hinders the recognizability of star voice actors and obscures much of the nonverbal communication for which stars like Marilyn Monroe were famous. Yet a familiar voice retains the tone, intonation, and accent of the performer, which brings with it a great deal of personality. Doty's description of gay spectators' practices of following stars they identify as queer and interpreting those figures in the context and with their extra textual knowledge is significant and relevant for a film like *Mulan*. An actor like Harvey Fierstein, a relatively minor character actor who embodies one of Mulan's fellow soldiers, Yao, may create depth and interest for spectators who recognize his voice and queer associations. Given likely adult audience recognition of Eddie Murphy and even the less well known Harvey Fierstein through the promotion of the film across media *outlets*, we might reasonably assume that many spectators

would associate a marked ethnicity or queer sexuality with voice actors, especially in recent years as well-known stars have notably filled several voice roles in major Disney films.<sup>171</sup>

Doty argues that because gay spectators often seek out knowledge of queer performers, they might be more likely to recognize as gay more stars than might straight spectators. This practice suggests the power of stars and their public images to influence the interpretation of a character or film even in an animated work when we hear only the known actor's voice.

Although children watching *Mulan* would have likely been oblivious to implications discerned by adults who recognized Fierstein's voicing of Yao, the casting of the role does offer humor and irony stemming from the character's exaggerated heterosexuality and also overt stereotypical masculinity. Fierstein has been openly gay for decades and, besides having written and starred in a number of gay-themed productions (e.g., *Torch Song Trilogy* as play and film), has played both presumably feminine and openly gay characters in widely distributed movies including Chris Columbus' 1993 film *Mrs. Doubtfire*. In combination with his public persona, Fierstein's very gravelly voice sounds quite distinctive, making it probably more recognizable than the voices of then lesser known actors like B.D. Wong, another out gay actor, who voiced Shang.

Yao's character performs his masculinity through being aggressive, competitive, and unpleasant. When Mulan, upon first meeting other soldiers, slaps Yao on the back in an attempt to show male camaraderie, he immediately takes the slap as an affront and tells her that "I'm gonna hit you so hard, it'll make your ancestors dizzy." In the film's effort to show how Mulan learns to pass as a man, this quick aggression serves as one of Mulan's first lessons about masculinity. Yao also participates in the singing of "A Girl Worth Fighting For," asserting his

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<sup>171</sup> For example, in Pixar/ Disney's *Finding Nemo* (2003), the character Dory is voiced by Ellen DeGeneres, a well-known television star and celebrity who is openly lesbian.

heterosexuality with his line “My girl will marvel at my strength, adore my battle scars!” Yao enacts the stereotype of the excessively masculine working class male, in contrast with Li Shang’s performance of the gentlemanly ideal, in the film’s terms. The different available readings of the character Yao demonstrates the efficacy of Doty’s and Dyer’s theories of star image and spectator interaction for animated two-dimensional characters, which in this instance bear the gender-impersonating and –bending implications of Fierstein’s image for audiences “in the know.”

While young spectators likely would not know of Harvey Fierstein’s sexuality or persona at all –his counting as a star only in subcultures–it is common for Disney to cast stars recognizable to adolescents from live action films. For example, the pop star Mandy Moore voiced the lead in the 2010 Disney film *Tangled*. Similarly, Jane Lynch from *Glee* performed in the 2012 Disney film *Wreck it Ralph*. Lynch appears in television advertisements voicing the animated character, which further raises her visibility. She, like Fierstein, serves as an example of an openly gay actor who a young person who follows entertainment media would likely know is lesbian and married to a woman. Theories of the stars’ influence on spectatorship extends to any of the recognizable stars and to some degree lesser well-known actors present in these films.

Further illustration of how Dyer’s theories of stars can usefully pertain to animation arises in relation to the voice casting of the Chinese dubbed version of the film. In the Mandarin version of the film, the voice speaking and singing the lead male character Shang is probably the most well-known star to Hong Kong and probably other Chinese and many Asian audiences: Jackie Chan. Although Chan has become a star in the U.S., his indubitably dominant star standing for Chinese audiences would immediately infuse the Shang character with different implications than those of B.D. Wong’s English language performance. Chan’s popularity

among potential Chinese viewers clearly appealed to producers of the Chinese dubbed version, who capitalized on his fame by having Chan appear in a live action music video singing the “Dark Side of the Moon” in Chinese. Altogether Chan’s star performance as a martial artist renowned for his skill and talent would have been incorporated into Shang’s character for audiences who recognized Chan’s voice performance. In North America, Chan’s accented English and comedic persona would not likely have conveyed the typical earnest masculine character nature of Disney heroes to American audiences, but audiences who understand Chinese (whether Mandarin or Cantonese, depending on the version) would likely be familiar with a different set of Chan’s films and his voice speaking Chinese, which marks Chan’s persona as well as ethnicity and nationality, as understood in context, quite differently for audiences who recognized Chan in the Chinese version of *Mulan*. Dyer describes this effect of altered perspectives of the same star from different spectators in his description of Robeson as different for white and African Americans spectators<sup>172</sup>.

Like Disney’s *Mulan*, the widely circulated Japanese-produced film *Howl’s Moving Castle* also proves a useful case to test psychoanalytic and especially cultural studies approaches against the complex workings of voice in animated film. In this instance, the cross-cultural circulation of the work reveals that cultural differences in gender realization and spectator identification (especially related to the voice performance of the main character, Howl) can complicate the analysis, as can the potentially abstract characterization of objects like the fire Calcifer. Approached from Michel Chion’s psychoanalytically-grounded framework, the voices in *Howl’s Moving Castle* need somehow to match the characters on screen to avoid either “a profound malaise” or humor. Yet for a character like Calcifer, a fire demon, no “right” voice

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<sup>172</sup> Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 2.



may be possible. Billy Crystal's Calcifer in the English release of the film sounds gravelly, temperamental, and charismatic, while the Japanese fire has a higher pitched and certainly less gravelly sounding voice. The voice of a flame could of course sound like almost anything, as fire not only has no body, but also no intrinsic size to which a voice might somewhat "match." Animation clearly allows for many different interpretations of what could, following Chion's description, sound "right." Chion's argument presumes the presence of a (gendered) body, and while certainly bodies appear in animation, even some characters' bodies may remain abstract and bear no conventional gender or any other human-related markings that might cue spectators (or even producers) as to which voice might best "fit."

Thus, *Howl's Moving Castle* reveals that Chion's theory of voice in cinema does not usefully elucidate animation, in which bodies need not carry the markers of personhood which the "right" voice would presumably intensify. Similarly, Silverman's theory of the structuring of gendered voice in cinema embeds a presumption that also does not pertain to animation: that the voices and bodies of characters on screen are somehow socially fixed and clearly gendered. Animation's frequent representation of nonhuman characters and the flexibility in casting voices effectively invalidates the approach for analysis of animation. Again, for example, Calcifer (although a somewhat male-sounding name in English, like "Lucifer") is visually rendered with no marks of conventional gender. Indeed, despite the clearly male voicing of the character in the American, Japanese, and also French versions of the film, Calcifer holds in the narrative a notably conventional feminine position: the fire is physically most tied to the domestic space, doing the cooking and making the home literally "run." Further, like the housekeeper Calcifer must submit to the demands of all other characters except the child Markl. Even Calcifer's having possession of Howl's heart implies a kind of (conventionally heterosexual) marriage of

the two characters. Despite Calcifer's being voiced by male actors in both the Japanese and English dubbed version of the film, *Howl's Moving Castle* does not position Calcifer in a clearly male role. Thus I would again suggest that Silverman's assertions about the voice necessarily conveying gender are theories that do not meaningfully pertain to many instances of animation.

Dyer's cultural studies-based discussion of the significance of star images proves of more value in analyzing *Howl's Moving Castle*, which becomes particularly interesting due to the cultural differences evoked in voice casting for the Japanese and the American markets. *Howl's Moving Castle* has enjoyed extensive transcultural appeal, as do many (well-promoted) animated films, due to relative ease in dubbing the voices of animated figures (and shifting thereby, as demonstrated above, also cultural meanings). Unlike *Mulan's* narrative, which the Disney version ties specifically, if culturally inaccurately, to the ancient tale's Chinese origins, *Howl's Moving Castle* does not make the same investment communicating the story's origins in the British Isles.

In the Japanese original soundtrack, Howl is voiced by Takuya Kimura, a famous pop singer in Japan whose appearance counts for North American audiences as rather androgynous. The animated Howl realizes Kimura's appearance rather closely (except for his hair color), which, again, for some international audiences (especially those not familiar with Japanese anime) might appear effeminate. Such a practice of an animated image realizing the planned voice actor's appearance is of course common in feature animation. For example, a number of the early cartoon characters were drawn to evoke Charlie Chaplin through animated dancing and visual humor. A specific instance of an early animated figure that clearly references Chaplin occurs in the credits of *Ballet Mécanique*, directed by Fernand Léger (1926, France). Similarly, a character like Betty Boop with her bee sting lips and bobbed hair cut seems clearly modeled on

the well-known popular singer of the 1930s, Helen Kane, who actually sued over the resemblance.<sup>173</sup> More recently we can see similarities between the genie and Robin Williams in *Aladdin* and between the on-screen Mulan and voice actress Ming-Na Wen. Howl, like Kimura, has long flowing hair and angular features. But the actor who voiced Howl for the English language version produced and released by Disney, Christian Bale, is much more pronouncedly masculine in looks and mannerisms for most North American audiences than is Kimura, and also has a lower-pitched voice.

Thus one can again observe, as for Shang in the American compared to the Chinese version, that the gendering of an animated character depends very closely on the casting of voice actors, whereby the voice tends to inflect the reading of gender in the visual embodiment of that character more than the opposite (as is primarily the case for live action film, also if dubbed). Still, the drawings of the character do communicate meanings within (varied) cultural contexts independently from the voice actor's performance, which a cultural studies approach to spectator perception of star images such as Dyer proposed cannot explain. Nor can star image approaches to animation spectatorship yield insights if audiences do not in fact recognize the voices of actors, either cross-culturally (e.g., American audiences listening to the Japanese with subtitles not recognizing Kimura) or even within the culture in which that actor does count as a star (as, e.g., Murphy in the U.S., whom children may not recognize).

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<sup>173</sup> Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse*, 89. While animated characters like Betty Boop did at least in the 1930s evoke star associations for viewers, that influence generally worked more by way of an homage or visual reference to a star rather than through a recorded performance, as is the case for voice actors.

Donald Crafton argues in *Shadow of a Mouse* not that stars influence animated characters, but rather that stars can be drawn. Directly referring to Dyer's theories of star images, Crafton argues that animated characters can become stars through many of the same film industrial mechanisms that make actors stars, like stories in magazines, commercials, merchandising, and other means of intertextual references. Classical Hollywood cartoons include a great deal of humor that plays off of this notion of a character, such as Bugs Bunny sitting in the art studio at the end of Chuck Jones' 1953 *Duck Amuck*. The entire premise of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* parodies the notion that animated characters are stars. However, even Crafton acknowledges some need for modification of Dyer's theories as he argues that "Dyer's classic take on stardom focuses less on the studio-constructed image of stars than on the conflict between the lived biological body of the actor and its reception."<sup>174</sup> In animation of course, a character like Betty Boop has no biological body like Judy Garland, but only an imagined constructed image.

The necessity in animation to generate bodies and voice entirely separately has allowed filmmakers to cast voices that do not visually realize any marks of (human) gender, sexuality, race or ethnicity that might appear on screen race seen on screen. Thus as I have argued, with particular reference to issues of gender and sexual depictions, psychoanalytic approaches to voice like Silverman's do not prove relevant to animation. In contrast, Gorbman's and Kalinak's analysis of music and sound effects' influence on spectators functions the same for both live action and animation. The ways that sounds not including voices do operate throughout the different modes. Dyer's and Doty's cultural studies approaches particularly to the workings of star images do yield insights into how voice acting helps to create meaning in animated films.

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 91.

The capacity of voice in animation to avoid being tethered to visual representations opens up possibilities for interpretation and translation in ways that interestingly diverge from live action filmmaking.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to contribute to the discipline of cinema studies by offering a metacritical analysis of well-developed theories of spectatorship with reference to animation as a specific object of study. Thereby Judith Mayne's important work in her 1993 book *Cinema and Spectatorship* has served as a model for my approaching the challenge of assessing theories of film spectatorship in specific relation to animation, which I have argued has to date not received the warranted degree of systematic attention. Two decades ago, Mayne's work framed theories of cinema spectatorship in the late twentieth century by setting out significant concepts and explaining how different theorists have approached those. She also argued the need to reaffirm tenets of psychoanalytic theory and laid out the limitations from her perspective of then-current cognitivist theories. Mayne's work particularly argued that the tension between the concepts of the "viewer" and the "subject" could significantly inform theories of spectatorship, by complicating the understanding of how cinema addresses audiences and how such viewers perceive what they see and hear. She further pointed to how the tension between different theorists' understandings of dominant and resistant positions of spectatorship can produce a more nuanced theory of actual spectator reactions than any single theory can account for.

Film scholar Linda Williams and others acclaimed Mayne's work for providing an engaged historical overview of theories of cinema spectatorship that attended to paradoxes in the field which yield a rich understanding of the spectator. In my dissertation I have, like Mayne, offered something of a historical overview that traces the foundations of key theories of spectatorship, but also addresses some scholarship that has emerged since 1993, all in the service

of considering which contemporary theories can best explicate facets of spectatorship of wholly or partially animated films.

Arguably only over the past twenty years have scholars begun regularly to undertake more theoretically grounded approaches to the forms, styles, narratives, and technologies of animation. Over that period, however, three well-established peer-reviewed academic journals which focus on animation have published articles that integrate theoretical perspectives, with some occasional consideration of issues of spectatorship: *Animation Journal*, *Animation Studies*, *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Those journals have variously addressed varied animation styles and discourses within film studies, each publishing a range of work including histories and cultural case studies, modernist critiques, and essays drawing on psychoanalytic and other theoretical approaches. Alongside these journals, which publish many articles specifically examining animation, more general film journals have also included analyses of animation, such as Richard Neupert's essay on the spectatorship of animated film, "Kirikou and the Animated Figure," which appeared in *Studies in French Cinema*. Remarkably (at a time of publishing's reevaluation), a fourth journal entitled *Animation Practice, Process & Production* began appearing in print in England in 2011.

That new journal's appearance and to some extent content provides evidence of increasing interest not only in animation generally, but particularly in theories of animation, including animation spectatorship. Although still quite limited compared to the overall field of film studies and even film theory, that theories of animation are gaining wider circulation and prominence emerges from a number of books about animation (including theories of its workings and spectatorship) coming out in recent years, e. g. , Stephen Prince's *Digital Visual Effects In Cinema*; Donald Crafton's *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World Making in*

*Animation*; and Jason Sperb's *Disney's Most Notorious Film: Race, Convergence and the Hidden Histories of Song of the South*. The field of research is also enjoying a vital presence at scholarly meetings on diverse media forms, such as that of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. At the 2013 SCMS conference, no fewer than eight panels specifically addressed aspects of animation, with several others including some topics related to animation. All of these manifestations of discourse about animation suggest to me much broadened perception of animation—and the spectatorship of the mode—as an area valuable and worthy of significant scholarly attention.

This dissertation has focused throughout on examining well-established theories of spectatorship with an eye to querying whether such theories pertain or not, or if they do, how they might pertain differently, to spectatorship of animation. Certainly the now burgeoning field of animation studies seems ripe for further such theorization, for which I have attempted to lay some groundwork from my chosen meta-theoretical perspective. My testing of the most prevalent theories of cinema spectatorship—variously from psychoanalytic, cultural studies and also cognitive psychological perspectives—has revealed that while some such theories effectively yield an understanding of viewer responses to animated as well as live action cinema, other theories developed predominantly in relation to live action film prove less useful in analyzing spectatorship of animation without modification with respect to differences between the modes. I have found that cognitive theories of cinema provide a means of explaining how animated styles can generate cinematic elements that create a sense of realism or structure spectators' character engagement. However, I have also found that spectatorship of animation does function in some ways differently than live action spectatorship as analyzed by psychoanalytic and cultural theories that consider the embodied figures on screen. Animation films can “camouflage” or conceal



depictions of race and gender in ways that appear often subtler (but not necessarily less stereotypical) than live action film's expression of such social constructs. Sound effects and music do, I have argued, seem to function the same way in both live action and animation. Yet, again, psychoanalytic theories of voice require elaboration to account adequately for animation's capacity to connect the voice of a performer with a body that has no indexical connection to the image on screen. Finally, cultural (star) studies approaches to cinema reception can, I have argued, help account for the divergent impact of voice tracks depending on differing star performances in varied language versions of an animated film.

The primary issue that I have argued implicitly throughout and here explicitly, indeed, perhaps my most significant point in this dissertation, is the need to combine various theories of spectatorship to achieve the best possible understanding of animation. In *Cinema and Spectatorship*, Mayne argues that the different theories of animation do not necessarily conflict; she indeed refers to the historical discord as a comparison between apples and oranges. I would push further to call for an integration of only superficially opposed theories as they can be meaningfully combined to achieve greater insights.<sup>175</sup> I thus argue for an approach to film that incorporates varied theoretical approaches in order to see film from more perspectives than any one theory allows. Spectatorship is intriguingly multifaceted and approaching it from a single perspective creates a narrowed understanding of the complexities for spectators and the ways that film appeals to and engages them. Integrating the different theories into an overarching analysis without ascribing to one particular theory creates an opportunity to explore many aspects of a given film without the artificial constraint of holding to one theoretical approach.

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<sup>175</sup> Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 7.

Thus I have attempted to demonstrate throughout the dissertation that combining theories allows for an approach that speaks to many facets of a particular film's spectatorship. For example, Murray Smith's cognitive understanding of engagement clarifies how the relationship between a spectator and a screen character can establish engagement if the film creates a particular character as recognizable and then promotes alignment and allegiance. Such a cognitive approach creates a frame into which other theories can be integrated, without thereby limiting or governing the other theories. Rather, the cognitive understanding of engagement provides a structure that can work with the other theoretical approaches.

Concepts of recognition and alignment provide an illustration of the point I have argued with specific reference to animation. Chapter Two discussed recognition as defined by cognitive theory as essentially a spectator's ability to discern that there is a particular figure with agency. For Murray Smith, alignment is a perspective that occurs when the spectator associates with a character for some portion of the film, which films accomplish through camera angles and narrative point of view. For Laura Mulvey, the effect of such alignment (although she herself does not use the word) derives from and further supports a misogynistic film tradition that informs a spectator's perspective and ability to identify with characters. Integration of Mulvey's analysis into Murray Smith's later cognitive approach thus serves meaningfully to elaborate the cognitive view of how alignment may impact the film's viewer.

With regard to allegiance, Murray Smith's understanding of the term includes the emotional connection to a character usually marked with sympathy, empathy, or aversion. Certainly, I would concur with Smith, films often create emotional connections through such mechanisms as having the character make moral decisions, but those relations can also arise from more complex qualities such as a character's charisma and other identifiable traits. These

characteristics appear to relate to the cultural studies approaches as discussed by hooks, Dyer and others. For hooks, for example, the ways that identify cultural awareness of race and gender generating critical understanding is not limited to character actions as morally good or bad. Dyer's analyses accounting for how, for example, Judy Garland became a gay icon because of her sympathetic characters or Robeson came to be understood differently by African Americans and whites, demonstrate further how spectators' sense of race and sexuality inform their feelings about characters. Dyer's and also hooks' analyses can thus contribute to an understanding of how spectators develop allegiance, even though they do not use the term allegiance. Cognitive film studies thus only contributes a different perspective to issues of allegiance which cultural studies approaches have analyzed for decades. Working with the approaches jointly can foster an understanding of engagement that does a much more effective job of explaining spectators than any one theory alone has accomplished.

I would also argue here in conclusion the importance of developing theories of media spectatorship particularly to account for newer forms, formats, audiences, and "platforms" of animated media as they evolve. Forms of commercial animation continue to develop as techniques and technologies become more sophisticated. For example, the digital version of rotoscoping, often referred to as motion capture, blurs the lines between the actor and the animated character. Whereas without rotoscoping only the animator physically influenced the performance, the moving actor thus "captured" also inputs their movements onto the animated character. Famously through the technique of motion capture, for example, the actor Andy Serkis, who was cast as Golum in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy from 2001–2003, voiced and physically performed the creature's role.

Digital animation's capacity to replicate live action has also begun creating spaces and sometimes characters that spectators cannot always recognize as digital. Animation's growing range of technological options raises questions about how the developments might change our perception of what animation is. These questions and others all suggest a need for continued examination of animation as it becomes more deeply incorporated into the film experience. This point emerges as significant especially as animation technologies and styles shift and expand. Cheaper cameras and desktop technologies allow more people at home to make animation. With a camera phone and Windows Media Maker, iMovie or other downloadable software, anyone can make computer generated animation, hand drawn or stop motion animation, and, as evidenced on Youtube, many are doing so. This expansion of the access to animation signifies new opportunities to create new and different kinds of animation which generates an exciting and more diverse field of study.

Through taking theories of film spectatorship as the subject of this dissertation and animation as its object of analysis, I have sought to demonstrate the relevance of the former topic to the latter and, more generally, from a metacritical perspective, to demonstrate the need for more extensive scholarly attention to the connections between the two. Clearly I have not concluded that animation spectatorship is always necessarily different from that for live action. Indeed, I have argued that similarities between the modes make many aspects of established film theory highly relevant to animation. However, I have also argued that spectators do encounter animated figures differently than those enacted in live action. Those differences derive, I have argued, due to conventions of animation (humor, stretch, the play with forms, and anthropomorphism), as well as cultural and social conventions that shift with the capacity through images and sounds to give race and gender to anthropomorphized characters which

might otherwise not be thus marked (or not even represent living creatures). In addition, our awareness of stars deviates somewhat from that which we have in watching live action film.

To continue to be relevant, theories of cinema spectatorship must incorporate an awareness of animation, an increasingly prevalent form of cinema. In instances where animation spectatorship may diverge from that of live action (for example, in the ways that disembodied voices relate diversely or ambiguously to gender), we need a better understanding of the implications for reading gender representation of animation as a mode (including in computer animation that may largely succeed in looking like live action). At this juncture, animation typically follows the patterns of live action film, by demonstrating overt indicators of gender and often race, yet animation's capacity for flexibility and ambiguity can open new theoretical avenues for voice that have not yet been pursued.

I myself would conclude that particularly in light of how culturally significant animated film has become, theorists of cinema need to recognize—and feel inspired to redress—the circumstance that theories of film spectatorship developed with reference to live action film and often do not pertain fully to animation due to the mode's capacity to camouflage, caricature, and shape characters. I would argue that such work to gain deeper understanding of animation's impact is particularly important now, because the gaps in understanding animation spectatorship will only expand with the growing field. As animation changes and develops with new technologies, it manipulates images in ways new for spectators, using effects we have not fully examined or even imagined. We should, I believe, work to establish (as I have attempted to begin to do) a baseline of understanding for spectatorship of animation, as a foundation for better grasping the parameters of spectatorship of all film.

Mayne's *Cinema and Spectatorship* registered and challenged the ways that theories of film spectatorship had evolved and stood at the moment of her study; thereby she also contributed to a larger understanding of both the spectator and film. With this intervention, I have tried more modestly to signal the need for theorists of animation and film more generally to explore differences in animation and live action that influence our perception of cinema. Hopefully, active film theorists committed to singular or, better, from my perspective, to multiple approaches to analyzing the on-going issues of perception/reception and impact of cinema/media, will incorporate modes other than live action more thoroughly into their analyses. I hope in this dissertation to have made clear that the spectatorship of animated films has long been but is now ever increasingly and inexorably an integrated facet of the cinema experience. That experience may in some ways resemble and in other ways diverge from the experience of live action film; either way, the phenomenon poses a challenge to contemporary cinema theorists further to seek rigorously to understand the spectatorship of animation on its own terms.

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